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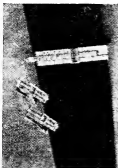
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EDITORIAL

IN the world of magazines, radio and television, writer-artist Frank Tinsley (r) is known familiarly as "The Man of Tomorrow." It is with pardonable pride, therefore, that we bring you the "man of tomorrow,"—today. With the article in this issue on the assembly of a space station, we begin his new series, "Man In Space."

Tinsley begins with facts—the what, when, why, and how-to. Then he takes you—and we mean *takes* you—to the creation of his mind and lets you see and hear and smell and feel exactly how it is to be there: in space, on the moon, on the planets.

Tinsley is always accurate, always exact. His vehicles for the exploration and manipulation of other worlds are so detailed that you may well wonder whether the things he describes are not already functioning. We think—we hope—that this new blend of fact and fiction will intrigue you, inform you, and encourage you to come back for more of the same in succeeding issues.

That Tinsley is not far off base in his article in this issue is attested to by a recent news story from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. NASA recently ok-ed a \$100,000 contract for explora-

tion leading to the construction of "cosmic filling stations for spaceships." Said the news item:

"In time, a series of these space platforms could become manned refuelling points and wayside inns for astronauts bound on trips of exploration around the solar system—and possibly beyond. Under the con-

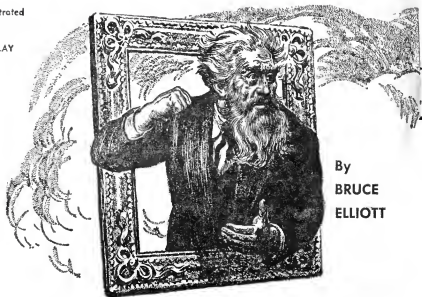


tract, Lockheed Aircraft Corp. is to study the feasibility of sending two satellites into orbit and hooking them together while they are whirling through space at 18,000 miles an hour."

Frank Tinsley—whose services Lockheed might well call upon—was born in another century: 1899, to be exact, in New

(Continued on page 128)

Illustrated
by
FINLAY



By
BRUCE
ELLIOTT

(First of two parts)

the PLANET of SHAME

One day, James Comstock's father took James aside and started to tell him the facts of life. Which was not so unusual—except that James was 35.

AT THE END . . .

THE THREE who had endured so much sat and waited. Their reward was in sight. When

you have fought for so long against forces strong beyond imagining, when you have struggled in despair, lived without hope, success when it finally



comes, is almost anti-climactic. Despite the traps, the violence, the hurts, the fear, they were now where they had wanted to be.

They sat quietly, their hands folded, and if any feeling of triumph was in them, it was so muted as not to be observable. At that precise moment, when they sat in the ante-room, waiting for their reward, waiting to become part of the Board of Fathers, working directly under The Grandfather, the only common emotion they shared was that they had fought the good fight. Fought as hard as it is in a person to fight for what they consider right . . .

The door opened and The Grandfather was in the room. His visage was marked by a high hooked nose, broad high forehead, and deep set harsh blue eyes, focused on the middle distance. His strong old hands were crossed on his stomach just below his patriarchal beard.

It was hard to believe.

Hard to believe that they, or anyone below the rank of Father would ever actually behold Him in the flesh.

When he spoke his voice was all the things they had known it would be. Deep as an organ bass, calm, full of authority, stern yet with a leavening of those other things that make up the whole man, his voice was almost gen-

tle as he said, "Follow me, please."

They rose and feeling like children, followed his tall spare back out of the ante-room, into that other room where the Board waited for them.

There was no fear in them now as there would have been a year ago. For they were not coming before the Board for judgment, but to be rewarded.

The Grandfather said, "These three are the ones . . ."

There was silence.

"They have come to join us," The Grandfather said.

The silence expanded.

"Gentlemen, Fathers all, these are the three new Fathers." The Grandfather's voice faded away and there was no other sound. None of the ten men who made up the Board of Fathers said a word.

But the three who had fought their way up to this eminence stood in silence and looking about them, examined the ten men with whom they would now share the control of their whole world.

This was the moment of their triumph.

CHAPTER 1

WHEN the first space ship landed on that pleasant world (the only pleasant planet of which Alpha Centauri could

boast) the crew was so happy to get rid of the passengers that they took off the moment they could. Not even the interminable boredom of the return trip was enough to make them want to stay in anything like proximity with the thirty men and thirty women who had been sentenced to be marooned as far from earth as was humanly possible.

There had been maximum security prisons in the past. But this was the ultimate maximum. When the ship took off, the prisoners were isolated as no human beings ever had been in the recorded history of men.

It was part of a plan of course. Earth did want the planet inhabited just as earlier powers had wanted Mars colonized. But when no volunteers appeared despite the cleverest high pressure advertising campaigns, the alternative became clear. If no one wanted to go to the new planet, to New Australia, then someone would have to be forced to go there.

It was just too bad for the exiles, but they could not protest too loudly, since they had long since forfeited any claim on anyone's sympathy. A little back eddy of intransigent inner-directed people, fanatics in a world of other-directed humans, positive that they, and they alone knew what was good and what was evil; the world heaved a

communal sigh of relief when they were taken away. Attempting, as these sixty had, to turn back the clock, to bring back into being the dark days of the twenty-second century, was such a horrid crime as to merit even so harsh a sentence as they received.

The first hundred and fifty years on New Australia were, in a way difficult. But not too difficult. To these inner-directed people fighting for existence on a new planet was precisely the kind of crusade which to them was worth living.

Five hundred years after they established themselves, their last scientist managed to set up a system of protective devices which prevented any communication with Mother Earth at all. No earth ship landed or took off, and no other means of communication had yet been devised that would work in interstellar space.

A thousand years later even the memory of earth had faded and grown dim. There were mentions of it of course in old books, but they were not the kind of books that these people read.

Their sun rose and set, their erratic moon rose when it seemed to feel like it, and sank seemingly just as randomly, their days were full and to them worth living.

All sixty of the first settlers had married. Sixty humans, thirty family names. They were, to these people good names, and therefore there had never been felt any need for new patronymics.

The planet's sprawling surface now contained millions of people but all of them shared thirty last names. It was nothing for anyone to question since to them this had always been the case. Science as such was an unknown word. It was one of the things that the original sixty settlers had fought against. When they made their brave new world, science was one of the earth things that was jettisoned. This, of course, led to some strange circumstances . . .

James Comstock 101, had reached maturity. At thirty-five he felt that the time had come for him to leave the home nest and go out on his own. His mother, as was to be expected, fought against his plans. But dad came through, as good old dad would.

Dad had said, "Now mother, admittedly Jimmy is still a little boy, but even little boys have a right to strike out for themselves."

"But Father," mother only called him that when something serious was under discussion, for after all, "Father" was a term of . . . Jimmy didn't know

quite what to think of it as . . . power? Awe? It was, in any event, a word that one did not bandy about.

"But Father," mother had become embarrassed, and surely that was a blush on her cheeks, "did you . . . have you ever . . . that is . . . what about . . . oh, you know."

Father had looked very serious. He had said, his voice deep in his chest, "You're right, of course. Come, son."

Then had come that conversation which had stunned Jimmy, opened up vistas unheard of, unthought of, really. So that was where babies came from . . . If anyone but his Father had told him about it he'd have struck them, perhaps killed them. To think that his mother had suffered through such an abysmal, horrible experience . . . and the results of that experience . . . Tremors swept through him in retrospect.

But that had been five years previously and Jimmy had become a man then under his father's aegis. That first time had been cataclysmically awful. The whole atmosphere of that place had been so foreign to him that it was only because he knew that his father was waiting downstairs in the parlor, waiting for a good report from the fallen woman that enabled Jimmy to go through with it at all. Not

that the woman had waxed very enthusiastic, but then, a creature like that . . .

HIS monthly visits to the brothel were now part of his being and although he still did not relish going, he forced himself to, for after all it was part of the duty of a man. He did so wish, however, that it was not necessary. Life would be so much simpler if he could just skip the whole unsavory thing.

Sighing, he pressed the button on the door. Inside the curtained window the brash lights of the place, red as sin, shone on his weakly handsome face. The tinkle of the piano droned on.

Swinging the door wide, the fat madame said jovially, "Jimmy my boy. Come on in and let joy be unrefined."

Shuddering delicately and wishing that the madame would not be quite so robust, Jimmy inched his way into the parlor. The red plush chairs and the dingy lights were just as they always were. At the piano the little man looked up, said, "Hiya, Jimmy, how's every little thing?"

"Pretty good, professor, pretty good." The whole conversation was as stereotyped as the act which would follow it. Sometimes Jimmy wished that just once the madame would sneer at him, or the professor be

grouchy, but they never were.

Lydia came down the stairs, her wrapper as dirty and unkempt as it always was. He wondered if she had a succession of these wrappers all equally dilapidated, or if she owned just one which she managed to keep looking the same way all the time.

Jimmy wished too, that Lydia were a little older. It seemed somehow a little indecent for her to be only forty. A child like that should not be forced to make a living the way she had to, but then they were all about her age. Jimmy had shopped around, tried to find an older woman but had been forced back into Lydia's arms. After all, she had been the one Father selected for him and good old dad knew best.

She said, "Come on upstairs honey lamb."

He followed her dolefully, averting his eyes from her full breasts which was altogether too prominent through the tight cloth of the wrapper.

Her room looked as if it had not been cleaned since the previous month. Stuck to the mirror was the picture of The Grandfather that always embarrassed him. The stern old eyes should not be forced to look down on the scenes in this room. Jimmy had tried to turn the picture to the wall one time, but Lydia had become hysterical and

he had given up. As a matter of fact it was only after a long argument and an increase in fee that Jimmy had been able to force her to turn out the light in the room when they did—what they did.

The old brass bed jingled just as embarrassingly as ever when he sat down on the edge of it to remove his shoes. It was only by keeping his eyes on his stockinged feet that he was able to avoid looking at Lydia who had dropped her wrapper to the floor and was now shamelessly considering herself in front of the mirror that lined the whole wall.

That had been the main reason he had insisted on the light being extinguished. The combination of the wall of mirror, the ceiling mirror and the searching eyes of The Grandfather were just more than he could bear.

There was no use, he knew, in asking Lydia not to look at her n...e body. She had told him many times that she enjoyed doing it; there was no law against it and what was he going to do about it?

Of course there *was* a law against women admiring themselves in any way, let alone n...e and in front of a mirror, but the law, of course, did not apply to p.....s.

Whistling gaily, Lydia dropped onto the bed next to him and wound her arms about him.

Almost dying with embarrassment he mumbled, "Lydia, the light . . . you promised."

Grumbling, she switched off the light. Then it began, again.

But this time, right in the middle, a lancing pain unlike anything he had ever experienced shot through his heart. The hurt was so great that he cried out in agony.

Lydia, unknowing, said cheerfully. "Attaboy. That's what I like to hear."

It was only after he gasped, "Don't . . . stop . . . my heart . . . I think I'm going to die . . ." that she finally stopped and turned on the light. His face was whiter, much whiter than the grey pillow case under his head. His lips were purple. He still felt what he could only visualize as iron fingers pressing into his heart.

Racing out of bed the girl ran towards the door. She gasped. "I'll call the madame, get a doctor . . ."

Crouched on the bed in agony, his hand pressing deep into the center of the pain, he was still able to retain the presence of mind to call weakly, "Put on your wrapper, Lydia, you can't go out that way."

Then the pain became so great that he passed out.

WHEN he opened his eyes he was in bed but it was an-

other bed, with crisp white linen on it. The pain, he was grateful to find, had eased up.

The adult woman in the nurse's uniform, who must have been a pleasant sixty-five, bent over him and whispered, "There, there, you'll feel much better now."

"The doctor?" he whispered.

"Coming." Her sweet face was wreathed in an angelic smile. Her buxom body was omnipresent. Wondering what kind of perverted monster he was, he found that he was fantasizing her in Lydia's bed. If only fallen women were mature, like this one, so many of his problems would be easier of solution. He guessed he just did not like young chits and that was all there was to it.

Luckily the doctor entered the room before the fantasy could go too far. Feeling mentally defiled, he greeted the doctor anxiously, glad of the interruption. "Doctor, do you know what's wrong with me?"

"Yes son," the white-haired elderly man was slow of speech, he considered each syllable before he allowed it to leave his thin lips. His sunken cheeks and hollow eyes were so typical of the whole medical profession that Jimmy found himself wondering, as he had before, what there was about doctoring that made men look like this.

"What do I have, doctor?" Jimmy's voice was tremulous.

"I've got bad news for you, son" It must have taken three minutes for the single sentence to be articulated by the doctor.

Sweating, Jimmy wondered what he had ever done, what commandment he could have unconsciously broken that was now punishing him for his sin.

"What is the cure, doctor?"

"First," the doctor said, "we must consider the disease."

Jimmy wasn't the least bit interested in what disease he had, there were cures for all known diseases. But he waited with baited breath to be told what terrible, what terrifying thing he would have to do in order to be cured.

"You have," the doctor said even more slowly, "angina pectoris."

Scrambling through his memory, Jimmy tried to remember what heart patients had to do. All he could think of at the moment was the treatment for arterio-sclerosis. It was so awful that he found himself saying a little prayer of thankfulness to The Grandfather, that he did not have to indulge in that cure. Adultery was the only known cure for hardening of the arteries and the prospect of what he would have had to go through made Jimmy almost glad that he had angina. Imagine, he kept

thinking, "I'd have had to get married and then be untrue to my wife . . ."

His gratitude faded a little when the doctor's droning voice went on, "As you may or may not know, son, the only cure for what you've got is drunkenness. We'll have to make you into an alcoholic, boy. I'm sorry."

The world reeled.

Jimmy had seen drunks, who hadn't, but the thought of having to share their disgraceful conduct was more than he could bear. He gasped, "I won't do it. I'd rather die."

"Ummm . . ." the doctor said, "a lot of them say that . . . but remember, boy, suicide is what you're talking about!"

Suicide, Jimmy thought sickly, the sin against The Grandfather!

Horrible as the cure for his disease was, he'd have to go through with it. But what would mother think when he came reeling home, singing songs, consorting with . . . he retched. no more seeing Lydia once a month, he'd have to consort with fallen women all the time . . .

Thank Grandfather, he thought dully, that dad is dead. It was the only thing for which he could feel grateful at the moment.

"Cheer up," the grey-faced doctor said and his voice was if anything more doleful than be-

fore, "be grateful you don't have cancer."

That was another thing for which to be grateful. The cure for cancer was the only thing he had ever heard of that was more horrible than that awful cure for arterio-sclerosis.

"Of course," the doctor said, "before we release you, we'll test you for all the known diseases."

Grandfather above, he thought despairingly, suppose something else is wrong with me!

CHAPTER 2

HIS heart condition was all the doctor found. Jimmy thought the medical man was a little grudging in the admission that nothing else was discernibly wrong, but gratitude that he was not worse off made him feel a little better.

Leaving the hospital with the lovely, elderly nurse holding him by one arm, and the doctor on the other side of him, Jimmy looked around him, at the street, at the people, at the mauve trees with their lovely puce foliage. It was night and the pale green moon moving in its eccentric path cast just the faintest tone over the whole scene. Admirably dressed women, their beautiful shapeless clothes hanging loosely so that nothing of their bodily contours could be seen, walked sedately along the black plastic

street, their dresses barely avoiding dragging on the eternal surface with which the last scientists, so many years ago, had covered the roads and the streets.

Perpetua, it was called, and seemingly it was correctly named. Striving madly to forget that which awaited him, Jimmy thought wildly about the street covering, about, in short, everything but the saloon that he was being escorted to . . . would the doctor and the nurse take him through the swinging doors? Or would he have to make that brave first step all by himself?

The doctor cleared his throat. "We're almost there, son. Be brave."

Be brave! A fine thing to say. It was easy for the doctor to make speeches, but he, Jimmy Comstock 101, was the one who was going to have to enter the foul place!

And then, despite the slowness of his steps, they were finally there. He realized, looking at the saloon, that he had never really looked at one of these dens of iniquity before. He had always, in the past, gone by them with averted eyes.

He reeled, and the lovely nurse, her exquisitely wrinkled face showing her concern, grabbed at him just in time to prevent him from falling to his face.

"There, there, Jimmy boy,"

her cracked voice was so . . . soothing and at the same time so exciting . . . he found himself beginning to fantasy about her again, and it was only this that gave him the bravado necessary to step through the swinging door.

A gust of beery air hit him in the voice. His throat closed up in revulsion at the disgusting odor. Behind him he could hear the nurse say, "Grandfather be with you now!"

And then she and the doctor were gone, and he was alone. Alone in the moiling turmoil, the frightful, frightening atmosphere of that which he must become. To the right, the left, everywhere he looked there were fellow heart disease patients. All of them were treating their disease. Some seriously, some seeming even to enjoy it, which Jimmy found impossible of comprehension. One of the ones who seemed to be enjoying the treatment of his disease staggered up to him with a fog of alcohol preceding him.

"Hi chum!" The drunk was small and young and seemingly very happy.

Jimmy gulped. "Hello, there, how are you? I'm James Comstock 101. Who are you?"

Danny Grundy 112. C'mon kiddo, wancha to meet an old buddy of mine."

The drunk had him by the

arm and there was no escape. Grundy pulled him through the welter of men and women who lined the bar and gulped or sipped their poisonous yet beneficial potions.

Behind the bar a tremendously fat man, a white apron pulled tight around the huge circumference of what Jimmy thought of as his tummy, said, "What'll it be? What's your pleasure?"

Jimmy turned to his new found friend and asked, "How can I get drunk the fastest, easiest way?"

"Leave it to me, old buddy, old sock," Grundy said.

"Maxwell, mix up three of your super-double extra strong corpse revivers, will you like a pal?"

"Surest thing you know," Max busied himself with bottles containing oddly colored liquors.

Rather than look at the terrible thing he was going to have to drink, Jimmy asked, "Where is the man you wanted me to meet?"

A howl of laughter from a nearby group drowned out his words, forcing him to repeat himself. Grundy looked at the group and said, "There he is. I'll bring him over."

The man he dragged to meet Comstock was equally young, no more than thirty-eight, with an unformed face, and the barest

amount of white hair at the temples. He had some pictures in his hand and as he was introduced to Jimmy he held out the photos.

Grundy said, "Tony Bowdler 131, wancha to meet my oldest friend, Jimmy—what was your name, old sock?"

Jimmy identified himself and as he turned his eyes to look at the pictures, Bowdler mumbled, "Do' wancha to think I'm unner the affluence of inkohol, but lemme know how you like them feelthy pictures."

The man's voice was blurred and Jimmy could not quite comprehend what he was saying. That was the only reason he looked at the top picture. All the blood drained out of his head. There, on the picture, brazenly posed for anyone to see, were a man and a woman. Good looking people too. The woman was real s..y. Almost seventy, with exciting white hair, and a deeply wrinkled face, she was even more desirable than the nurse.

How then had she ever allowed a despicable picture like this one to be taken? It was beyond Jimmy, completely beyond him. Frozen in the glossy eternity of the picture, her loose dress lifted so that her ankle showed, she was allowing the man in the picture to k..s her hand.

The picture blurred in front of Jimmy's dazed eyes. This was a kind of perversion beyond his

reckoning. How could people allow such a thing?

Grundy said, "You think that's hot, boy, lay a glim on some of the others! Here, look at these," he spread them out one at a time and giggled inanely, "This last picture is a real killer! Take a peak!"

Comstock shook his head no, but his new found friend paid no attention to him. Pointing to the foul pictures lined up on the bar he picked up the last one and held it right under Jimmy's nose. Just before he forced his eyes closed, the picture was engraved on his sickened brain.

The people were the same as the ones in the other picture, but, oh the depth of depravity, oh poor lost souls, the man was actually k...ing the woman full on the m...h!

The bartender said, "Hey, what's wrong with the Johnny-come-lately? Looks like he's going to faint. Better get some medicine in him fast!"

Bowdler grabbed Jimmy's one arm, Grundy the other, while the stout bartender poured the drink down Comstock's slack mouth. Gagging, half spitting, he still swallowed enough so that he could feel what he thought was liquid fire going down his aching throat.

"How's that feel, ol' pal?" Bowdler asked anxiously.

"Awful," Jimmy said, but he

sipped more of it anyhow. This was his curse, this was his cure, he had to take it, so he took it.

THE bartender went back to his other customers, and the trio raised their glasses. Jimmy's new found friends were teaching him how to make a toast.

"Here's to heart trouble," Grundy said, "thank Grandfather I didn't get cancer!"

"Tha's the boy. Drink her down . . . Bottoms up . . . Bowdler put his hand over his mouth. "Mus' 'pologize," he said, "reelize don't know you well enough to talk that way. Ve'y sorry, ole man."

Comstock gagged again, but this time not from the drink, but as a conditioned reflex. At that moment he could again taste the soap his mother had used to wash out his mouth that time when he was but a lad of twenty-nine, and he had slipped and said something about the b...m of a well. The drink helped to wash out the long enduring soap taste.

"Yeah," Grundy was saying. "I don't care how drunk a man gets, a gentleman never uses dirty words."

"You're righ' ole pal, ole pal. I'm sorry . . ." Bowdler hung his head in shame. As though to change the subject he picked up his pornographic pictures and

looked through them lovingly. At last, pausing over one that Thompson could see showed a man and woman in the last stages of reckless abandon, (they were holding hands) Bowdler said, "Y' know if I din' like gettin' drunk so much I'd be sorry I din't have tuberculosis so I could pose for feelthy pix like these."

"Y'know," Grundy had his arm wrapped lovingly around Jimmy's neck by now and they were on their second set of corpse revivers, "y' know I've known fallen women who told me they were kina glad they had diabetes. Don't seem possible, does it?"

"No." Jimmy's face was set sternly. "I cannot imagine snuch a t.ing. I mean I cannot magine uch a sting . . ." He rubbed his mouth. It felt a little strange.

Bowdler ordered another round. Nearby a particularly abandoned looking woman who must have been in the last stages of coronary thrombosis if the amount of liquor she had imbibed was any indication, waved to Jimmy.

He turned his head away quickly, hoping no one else had seen what the woman did. He was instantly sorry he had done so for suddenly the room swirled.

When it stopped, he turned to Grundy and said, "Shay, how often doesa room do that?"

"Do what'?" Grundy asked, his mouth slack.

"How offen do they make it go roun' and roun' like that?"

Evidently he had said something highly amusing for his new friends went off in gales of laughter. They had to whack each other on the back before they could make their giggles subside.

Grundy said, finally, "If you think this room is movin' wait'll you see your bedroom move tomorrow morning!" Then he and Bowdler went off into helpless laughter again.

Comstock tried to explain that there was no special mechanism in his room which would allow it to spin in any fashion at all, but the combination of the peculiar trouble he was having in articulating and the roars of laughter from Bowdler and Grundy made him finally desist. Perhaps this was some joke that he would have explained at some future time.

The fourth drink, Comstock found must have had some different ingredients in it although he had watched the bartender carefully and seemingly the same constituents went into the making of it, but, on sipping it, he found that the taste was different. He no longer felt as if he was going to die in agony when he swallowed. Instead, a rather

pleasant kind of warmth went all through him.

He gazed at his new friends. New? How dare he consider them that? These were his pals. Why . . . he'd cut off his right arm for either of them.

He felt a desire to explain this sudden feeling of comradery, but that odd thing affected his speech again and the words did not come out quite as he had expected they would. He wondered if a stutter or a stammer was part of angina pectoris, but that did not seem likely somehow.

The sixth drink he never had any remembrance of downing. As a matter of fact, the following morning when he woke up he had all he could do to figure out how, when and who had installed the merry-go-round mechanism in his room. Apparently the saloon was not the only place so equipped. Lying in bed, looking about him he at first wondered if he were in some strange place, but second thought reassured him. He was home, in his own bed. The colored portrait of Grandfather looked down at him . . . he hoped that the picture did not reflect any disapproval on Grandfather's part. He mumbled, "I can't help it . . . I'm sick . . . the doctor made me . . ."

Then he held onto the sides of the bed for dear life and

prayed that whoever was making the room turn around would stop sooner or later, preferably sooner.

On one of the circling trips the room seemed to slow down a tiny bit and he was able to crawl out of bed onto the floor. The floor was bigger and he lost the fear he had had in bed that he was going to fall out. At least there was no place to fall now.

When his mother entered the room he was curled up peacefully on the rug, sound asleep.

She woke him gently and gave him a glass of milk.

Jimmy eyed his mother in horror. How could he ever have loved a woman who could do such a terrible thing? The milk seemed to be fastened directly to his stomach. Racing from the room he found that there are more than a few problems connected with being a drunk:

WHEN he came back and fell into his bed, his mother moved around the room, opening the curtains letting in the sunlight, as she had every day of his life.

He said, "Mother, will you please take those hobnails out of your shoes? And whatever you're doing to those curtains, stop it. The racket's enough to rouse the dead."

"They wouldn't let me come to the hospital, dear," she said.

"Was it very bad for my little boy?"

"Very bad. Did you get the report on me?"

She nodded. "But do I really have to give you that poison they recommended for your mornings?"

"What poison?" If she'd only stop yelling.

"Coffee!"

At that moment he knew he would have sold his soul for a cup of coffee. Aloud he said, "Bring it . . . fast! And get that sickening glass of milk out of here. It's leering at me."

Shaking her head, she left.

If the inside sweats would only stop a moment, he thought, he'd be able to take time out to feel sorry for her. After all she hadn't raised her son to be a drunkard . . . it must be very difficult for her. But a question rose large in his mind. How had those bats gotten into his insides? Looking down at it, feeling what the bats were doing to the wall of his stomach, he called it a belly for the first time in his life.

"My belly," he said to himself, "hurts." And he didn't even feel the soap sensation in his mouth. But then the taste that was already there was so much like the inside of a parrot's cage that perhaps the psychic soap was just lost in the other, more horrible, taste.

Curiously he found that the steaming, jet black coffee made him feel better. How had he known it would? Perhaps Grundy . . . or Bowdler had told him about it . . .

His mother watched him drink the dread potion silently. Then she said, "My poor, poor boy. When do you have to do this terrible thing again?"

He lifted his head and found that he could endure the sunlight. In some lost cavern in the back of his head he heard Bowdler's drunken voice saying, "And if you think you're gonna die, buddy boy, remember, a hair of the dog will fix you up."

The idea of eating a dog's hair almost made him run for the bathroom again, but he conquered the feeling.

Then he considered his mother's question. When must he get drunk again? Why . . . right now. This minute. Besides, he wanted to find out more about these puzzles that baffled him, from his buddies. He smiled remembering the good feeling of fellowship that had been his when he had sung some old song with Bowdler and Grundy.

How did the words go?

His startled mother raised her eyebrows when her poor sick boy lurched to the side of his bed and began to hum, "For he's a jolly good fellow . . ."

Yep.

Back to the saloon.

That's where he belonged.

Rising slowly from some subterranean depth was the dawning realization that he was beginning to enjoy his ailment. . . .

Good old Grundy . . . Good old Bowdler . . . they were indeed the salt of the planet.

CHAPTER 3

THE portions of a woman's anatomy,' " Grundy was singing when Jimmy entered the bar, that appeal to man's depravity, are fashioned with considerable care . . .'" He broke off his song when he saw Comstock. "Buddy boy!"

Bowdler rushed over and threw his arms around Jimmy, "How's the old kid?"

"Fine, just fine. How about a drink?" Comstock found himself asking, just as though he'd been a bar-room habitue all his life.

The corpse revivers served their functions admirably, Jimmy found. In fact in just short of an hour, he was high on a cloud, feeling no pain.

That was when Grundy, whom Jimmy had thought was quite drunk, had drawn Bowdler and Comstock to a quiet table in the back of the saloon. Carrying their drinks they joined him. Jimmy was puzzled, for suddenly

Grundy had become very serious. Bowdler seemed to know what was in the wind.

When they were seated comfortably and Jimmy was sipping happily at his drink, Grundy looked around conspiratorially before he whispered, "Jimmy, how old is The Grandfather?"

The question was a double shocker. First because Jimmy was positive that this was the first time that holy name had ever been mentioned in such unhallowed precincts, and second because the veriest infant knew the answer. He said, "The Grandfather was, is and always will be."

Grundy grinned. "How do you know that to be true?"

Comstock's world stopped spinning. His breath froze in his lungs. Then he felt a heart attack coming on. He fell face forward onto the floor.

Bowdler said, "Now see what you've done! You should have led up to it more gradually."

"Let's see if we can revive him," Grundy's normally jolly face was set and strained.

When Comstock opened his eyes and felt consciousness return he found that his friends had him propped up in his chair and were pouring liquor down his throat. Gasping, he spluttered, "All right, all right. I'm okay now."

There was a pause, then Com-

stock asked, "What happened to me?"

The two other men avoided his eyes. Bowdler said at long last, "I guess you're not quite drunk enough."

He ordered another round of drinks and as they waited for the elderly waitress to bring them to the table Jimmy found himself remembering what had happened.

The only thing that prevented his passing out again was that the s...y waitress returned with their corpse revivers. He took a big slug, considered her bent back as she walked away and said, "I . . . seem to remember your asking me something about . . ."

"I did." Grundy's face was set with determination. "Now hold onto yourself, laddy boy. How do you know that The Grandfather has always been and always will be?"

The traumatic shock was strong again but he had drunk some more and so was able to hold on while all the blood drained out of his head. He finally managed to say weakly, "Because everyone knows that to be true." Life without Grandfather was inconceivable. Who would look after them? Protect them? To whom could a man turn if not to The Grandfather?

Grundy and Bowdler exchanged meaningful glances. "If

He always was, how come there's no record of His having made the trip from Earth?"

A trifle drunkenly, Comstock considered the question. Earth? Oh, yes that was the fable, the children's tale that his people had emigrated from some other planet. He had dismissed the whole thing as the usual kind of Father Goose story that kiddies were told. Aloud he asked, "You mean you two think there really is another inhabited planet?"

"Think?" Both men spoke simultaneously, but it was Grundy who continued. "We know it. Look, Jimmy, we're risking a great deal, and before we go on, we'll have to swear you to secrecy. Whether you join us in what we have in mind, or not, you must swear on your father's memory that you will be silent as the grave . . ."

They waited, poised on the edge of their chairs with nervousness.

When he deliberated so long that their nerves were jangling, Bowdler said, "Look, Jimmy, do you want to have to live and die as a drunk, just because it's the only known cure for your disease?"

Things were popping too fast for Comstock to be able to grapple with them intelligently. He mumbled, "Nothin' wrong with being a drunk. I like it fine."

Grundy sprang to the attack. "That's too bad, old man, because it means the cure won't work. You should know that, the doc should have told you! The vice must be distasteful or the cure doesn't work!"

Looking back on the Comstock of yesterday, Jimmy could see why the doctor had not felt it necessary to make this point. It certainly had been unpredictable that he'd enjoy drinking. But it was his new friends who had made it fun . . . Had they done it deliberately? Too much to grapple with . . . he'd better wait and see what they had in mind. He said, "I swear to keep silent."

Bowdler said, "Go ahead, Grundy, it's your story." Parenthetically, he explained to Jimmy, "You know, or I guess maybe you don't, that before Bowdler here, got sick, he was Head Genealogist."

"No kidding!" Comstock was amazed. Head Genealogist! Whew . . . that was a post that almost ranked with being a Father! Bowdler was . . . or had been, a big man!

"As part of my job," Bowdler said, "I went back to the beginning. I checked the passenger list on the Bon Adventure, the space ship that brought the original Thirty to this planet from Earth."

Gulping down his drink, hur-

riedly Comstock ordered another round. To mention the Thirty . . . it was almost as blasphemous as talking about The Grandfather! These two were dangerous men. He'd listen to what they said, but then he must, literally *must*, report them to the authorities! He was sorry for them for he liked them, but blasphemy like this had to be punished.

Bowdler went on, "That was the first time the thought occurred to me to wonder about ole Grandpop!"

Grandpop! Blasphemy piled on blasphemy. Comstock could feel his ears burning.

"And you know something," Bowdler lowered his voice to the veriest whisper of communicable sound, "There was no record of His having made the trip! None at all!"

THE silence dragged itself out. Comstock was in a condition bordering on insanity. Although he managed to keep his face still. The temerity of these two . . . apostates!

"As a matter of cold brutal fact," Bowdler said broodingly, "there is no record of The Grandfather at all until about five hundred years ago! I checked, I read books that no one, absolutely no one has even looked at for centuries . . . and by Grandpop himself, there's not even a men-

tion of Him, till about a hundred years after they killed off the last scientists."

No one had ever before discussed these things openly, or covertly, with Comstock. A new emotion was beginning to make itself felt. He was becoming interested. The last scientists . . . he remembered all about them from school. The monsters! It was a good thing they had been wiped out. But even so it was exciting hearing it talked about. He leaned forward on the table and sipped his drink more slowly. There was plenty of time to report Bowdler and Grundy. After all, the authorities would want as much information as he could get.

Grundy spoke for the first time in a long time. He said, "That's where I come in. I used to be custodian of the hall of records."

Jimmy felt a little better. After all, a janitor! His job before he'd become ill had been better than that. He had been a law clerk at the Bureau of Commandments . . . it didn't compare with the office that Bowdler had held, and yet it was certainly a lot better than . . . But Grundy was speaking. He said, "Bowdler got his heart attack when he began to wonder about where The Grandfather had come from. I got mine when I was ordered by the Board of

Fathers . . ." "Oops," Comstock thought, a janitor working for the Fathers was nothing to be sneezed at, he'd better wait and see what was coming.

Grundy went on, "The only reason I even looked at the record I was supposed to burn was because I had glanced at it and had seen a G. I wondered if it had something to do with my family . . ." He put his hands to his forehead. "If only I hadn't . . . I'd still be happily at work . . . with no heart trouble . . . and with no need to drink this stuff . . ." He gulped down some of his drink.

"Buck up, old man," Bowdler said. "What's done is done."

"You're right. I must be a man." He shook his head dolefully. "It wasn't about my family at all. It was about the Gantrys . . . and you know how powerful that blood line is. I don't have to tell you! Ever since Elmer the First, they've been on top of the heap!"

Comstock nodded. As if any sane person would even question the qualifications of the Gantrys to be leaders! These two men were even more dangerous than he had suspected. It was up to him to keep his mouth shut and his ears open, by The Grandfather it was!

The furrows in Grundy's forehead were deeper now. His el-



bows on the table, his head in his hands, he looked off into the middle distance. He said, and he was almost speaking to himself, his voice was so low, "It was only when I examined the records that I began to wonder if it was truly ordained that the Gantrys were the leaders and would be the leaders, under The Grandfather's eagle eye. Funny." he mused, "all it takes is the tiniest notion to question these eternal verities, and then without your even being aware of it, the questions begin to demand answers . . ."

Bowdler broke in. "That was the mood Grundy was in when he and I met here in the saloon. Two men, both possessed of a tiny bit of knowledge not shared by anyone else on New Australia, and by chance we met here . . ."

Jimmy drained his glass and the action of tilting his head back brought the level of his eyes higher than it had been. That was the only reason he saw the face that was framed in a little window at the back of the barroom.

His breath shot out of his lungs as though he had been hit by the hind legs of an astrobat. He gulped, "Grundy! Bowdler!"

Their heads swivelled and they too saw what had frightened him.

"One of the Father's Right

Arms!" Bowdler said. Then, with a visible attempt to keep his voice down and his face from showing the fear that gripped all three of them, he said, "This is what we had to be prepared for; are you with us, Comstock?"

Now was the moment for decision. If, Jimmy thought, he were to act bravely, throw himself on the two apostates and wait for the R.A. to get to them, he could then explain what horrors the two evil men had been discussing. But, and the canker of indecision gnawed at him, but, what after all had he really learned? Only that these two men were questioning the eternal verities. There was more to it, much more, of that he was convinced.

There was perhaps an inch of liquor left in Jimmy's glass. Draining it, he made the decision which he was instantly to regret. He said, "I'm with you two. What shall we do?" Better, he had decided, to go along with Grundy and Bowdler and pretend to be part of their horrid scheme, that was the only way that later on he could report fully to the Fathers.

Grundy and Bowdler smiled at each other. Grundy said, "He's with us! Let's go!"

All this time the R.A. had been watching them, his little eyes preternaturally alert, his

gaunt hand steadily holding the gun that pointed straight at them, his attention completely focussed on the trio.

Bowdler leaned forward on the table till his head was close to Jimmy's. He whispered, "When I say three, duck to the floor. Stay there till I grab you."

All around the three men the life of the saloon went on blithely. The other heart disease patients were drinking; some solemnly, some gaily, the aged waitresses were busy with their Hebe-like duties, the bartenders were mixing drinks, but to Jimmy, the whole of life . . . and perhaps death were contingent upon the next three seconds.

"One." Bowdler's voice whispered.

Jimmy could see Grundy bunching his heavy muscles for some kind of action.

"Two."

Watching the R.A. out of the corner of his eyes, Jimmy wondered if it was just his imagination or if he had really seen the R.A.'s trigger finger tighten on the stungun's trigger.

"Three!"

CHAPTER 4

LATER, looking back on the scene that followed, Jimmy was never quite sure just what had happened in just what order. For the first thing that

erupted was the table. Grundy had suddenly tilted back in his chair throwing his heavy body over backwards. His legs, under the table, served to catapult the heavy object straight up towards the little spy window where the R.A. waited.

Bowdler had thrown his own empty glass straight at the eternally lit little bulb that had supplied the only illumination.

Darkness, then the crash of the table, then Comstock had obeyed orders and thrown himself flat on the floor. Next to him he had heard Bowdler land heavily.

The second crash as the table fell to the floor was the signal for Bowdler to grab Comstock by the arm and whisper, "Crawl after me."

Darkness and silence.

None of the other heart patients in the saloon had uttered a sound. That was not surprising of course, as anything unusual that ever happened was always the result of the action of the R.A.'s and it ill behooved anyone to interfere with them . . .

The only sign of light was the little flicker that came from the R.A.'s halo.

The sight of it was enough to make Comstock's blood run cold. Hopelessly he wished for a heart attack that would make him *hors de combat*, but for once that organ seemed impregnable.

Then, crawling on his hands

and knees, crawling after the unseen bulk of Bowdler, with fear in him like a live thing, Comstock died a thousand deaths. In the darkness a bulky body had bumped into him, and for a moment his heart had seemed to stop completely but then he realized it was only Grundy. The man had whispered, "Not far now."

Most frightening of all had been the moment when his head had touched the solid wall of the back room of the saloon. That had not been frightening in itself, but what had happened next was the worst of all, for suddenly the solid wall was no longer solid.

Frozen immobile, he had waited till Grundy had said, "Go on . . . hurry up."

Behind him Bowdler had pushed him, hard.

There was no choice. He went through the no longer solid wall.

Then there was another terrible period of darkness and silence and crawling along on all fours.

Bowdler finally spoke and he no longer whispered. He said, and his voice was harsh and loud, "It's all right now. We can stand up."

Then a light had flooded them.

And so here he was, Comstock thought dully, his brain feeling about as perceptive as a plate of liver as he stood in the small room that had no right to be where it was. Not that he knew

where that was, but he knew that The Grandfather would certainly not approve of a hideout, and there could be no doubt that he was in such a place.

Grundy and Bowdler looked at him and enjoyed his manifest surprise.

Jimmy asked, "What, where, how, I mean . . ."

"We're not exactly fools, you know, Comstock old boy," Grundy said. "We knew that the R.A.'s had us under observation. We knew, too, that it was only a question of time before they came after us."

"But the saloon wall, how did we go through that?"

"Trap door, old sock, just a trap door." Bowdler grinned.

"And the tunnel we went through?" Comstock asked and then, looking around at the sybaritic furnishings of the little room, he asked, "This room, what is it?" Never in his life had he seen a room with such overstuffed chairs, such soft warm colors, such a concern for creature comforts.

"Evidently," Bowdler said with an evil smirk, "Elmer Gantry 104 does not really believe in the Spartan virtues that he preaches so loudly."

"You mean this belongs to a Gantry?" Earlier, the very idea of being in a room that belonged to a Gantry would have made

Comstock swoon, but his experiences were evidently toughening him, for aside from a certain feeling of breathlessness, and the knowledge that all the blood had left his face, and a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, the blasphemous information did not affect Comstock at all.

Bowdler was standing with his back to Comstock, his hands linked behind his back, as he teetered back and forth from heels to toes and looked at some three dimensional pictures that hung on Gantry's walls.

Only the fact that the n...e women in the round, true-color pictures were young, between twenty and thirty years old kept Comstock from a heart attack. If they had been older, the obscenity of their n...y would surely have made him pass out. He could not help wondering how Bowdler could seem to enjoy looking at the young women. It was incredibly revolting to Comstock's sense of the rightness of things.

"Sit down," Grundy said, "let's have a council of war."

Sitting on the very edge of the too-soft chair, keeping his back rigid, Comstock kept his attention glued on Grundy and Bowdler. Now perhaps, he would pick up some information of real value to the Fathers.

He noticed with some dismay that the other two men slouched

back in their chairs and seemed to be enjoying the ease of their surroundings.

He asked uneasily, "Is there no chance that the R.A. will follow us here? Don't they know about this retreat?"

"Would any R.A. dare to contaminate a Gantry's home with his presence? Relax, Jimmy." Bowdler sprawled out, his large t...b hanging over one arm of the over-stuffed chair. "The only chance we're taking is that Gantry may come here. I checked and found that he is conferring with the Fathers today."

How easily these two men spoke the terrible words. It made Comstock sit ever straighter on the very edge of the chair he occupied.

The cool air of the room which seemed to have been washed and cleansed before entering the sacrosanct area was pleasant on Jimmy's heated face even while he wondered how a windowless room could be so aired.

"I gather," Bowdler said as he smiled at Jimmy's obvious consternation, "that you have never been in a home of one of the Thirty before?"

Dully, Jimmy shook his head no.

"You'll find, laddy boy, that this is a strange world we live in with many paradoxes that to Grundy and me, demand an explanation. It wasn't too long ago

that we were like you and found only elderly ladies attractive. But you know, as soon as we found out that the Thirty like their women young, we too began to find something vastly exciting in youth."

SO ALARMED that he dare not continue to look at Bowdler, Jimmy looked around the room trying to find something to change the subject, some object on which to focus. On a book shelf nearby he saw one of his childhood favorites, and grabbed it with a feeling of relief.

It was a copy of Father Goose. He ran his eye over the first poem and drew from the verse of Jack and Jill the knowledge that the world had not gone insane. There, it was just as he remembered it,

"Jack and Jill went up the hill
To a of water.
Jack fell down and broke his
. . . .
And Jill came af-
ter."

He rifled through the pages as Bowdler went on talking. On page ten was another favorite,

"Little Polly Flinders
Sat among the cinders
Warming her pretty little
. . . .
Her mother came and caught
her
And whipped her little daugh-
ter

For spoiling her nice new
."

But the assurance of the known faded away as Bowdler's voice went rumbling on and on. "It occurred to both of us that perhaps there was some reason why we are brought up to esteem aged women so much. After all, if old ladies are as exciting as we are taught that they are, how come the Ganttrys and others of the Thirty only have young concubines? This was one of the questions we asked ourselves, and we think we have the answer . . ."

Grundy broke in, "Have you ever wondered, Comstock, why it is that the only women who have children are the ones who are called up before the Fathers?"

This was even worse than the time Comstock's father had told him the "facts of life." Much worse, for what Grundy was intimating was at variance with what his father had taught him. It was worse.

"Maybe," Grundy said broodingly, "just maybe there is a damn good reason why the Fathers are called the Fathers!"

There are moments in life so terrifying that the very ground seems to shift beneath one's feet. That was the sensation that Comstock was experiencing. All was alien. He clung to the tattered copy of Father Goose as the only tangible thread that

held his reeling sanity together. Averting his eyes from Grundy's and Bowdler's faces he hurriedly read,

"There was a little girl
Who had a little curl
Right in the middle of her
.....

And when she was good she
was very, very good.

But when she was bad she
was

Even the familiar rhyme failed in its lulling purpose. He could no longer hide behind its chant-like curtain. Bowdler's voice went on, striking ever more harshly at the roots of Comstock's being.

"What a mockery all of our lives would be if what Grundy and I think is true. Suppose everything we have been taught is a lie. What then little man? What then?"

From some unknown and previously untapped reservoir of strength Comstock managed to dredge up the ability to say, "That's ridiculous. There would be no reason under the two suns for that to be true. The truth is mighty and will prevail."

"Just a little less of the copy-book maxims if you don't mind, old man," Bowdler said. "Hear us out."

"Just suppose," Grundy bent his stocky middle body over so that he was closer to Comstock. "Just suppose for the sake of ar-

gument, that we are right. That our whole way of life is false. Look what that could mean."

Bowdler broke in, excitement making his voice harsh and rasping "Suppose there is no real merit in old age. Suppose that the one-hundred-and-fifty year olds whose intelligence we worship as a matter of course, are really just senile old people! Then what?"

Grundy's face set. His mouth set in thin lines of derision. "I know for a fact, that the Elders, are just that. Elder. There's no magic in old age no matter what they taught us in school or what they keep yelling and yammering at us all the time. Old people are just old . . ."

Was there no end to the men's blasphemies? Comstock shook his aching head wearily. First they had attacked the peak of all things, The Grandfather. Next they had profaned the Fathers, and now the Elders. What sacred functionaries were left to attack? None, he realized with some relief. For the pyramid of his government was erected on the broad base of the Elders, who were guided and advised by the Fathers, who were in turn guided and led by that font of all knowledge, The Grandfather.

Taking a deep breath and setting his heavy jaw, Bowdler said, "If The Grandfather is a fake as I am beginning to believe, and

the Fathers a pack of self-seeking sybarites who stay in power just because they are the most direct descendants from the original Thirty, and if the Elders are doddering fossils whose intellectual powers are supposed to befuddle us and keep us in place, than I say with Grundy, the time has come to overthrow this foul regime."

So there had been a final blasphemy left!

This one was so gigantic, the meaning Bowdler's words conveyed, so treasonable, that Comstock found himself waiting for the end. Just so far could men go and no further. These two must be wiped out, destroyed along with their poisonous statements!

The idea!

Overthrow The Grandfather!

The very lightnings would, must come down and blast the two impious villains where they stood.

Comstock waited.

The lightnings, if they were coming, seemed long delayed.

But surely The Grandfather who was everywhere and knew all things must have overheard these infidels.

Why then did He not strike them down, limb and body?

It was only then, that in the very back of Comstock's mind a nervous little finger of doubt began to twist and turn, and finally asked a question.

"Suppose," the little finger scratched on the blackboard of his cortex, "suppose they're right . . . suppose The Grandfather is not all powerful and all knowing?"

Then he waited for the lightnings to strike him too.

And all the while he wrestled with himself his two friends sat in strained silence, waiting . . . waiting . . .

No lightning.

Some of the tension began to drain out of Comstock, and as it did, Grundy and Bowdler exchanged knowing looks. Bowdler said at last. "Welcome."

"Welcome, Jimmy." Grundy smiled, "now you are one of us."

One of them.

He had exchanged the peace and security of resting in Grandfather's arms, of putting his weary head against Grandpop's long beard . . . Grandpop? How fast he was sliding . . . He had exchanged the surety of his life, for what?

For the friendship of two drinking companions. Somehow the swap did not seem to his advantage.

Bowdler seemed almost to be able to read his mind, for he said, "Buck up, Jimmy, You're going to find it's good to be a whole man. There are rewards!"

But all Comstock could remember was the ease and safety of that which he was surrender-

ing. It came hard. Very hard.

"Growing up is always difficult," Bowdler said, his voice soft and full of understanding. "But I promise you there are rewards."

What rewards?

Before Comstock could put his question into words, there was a crashing sound at the door, the real door, not the hidden one by which they had entered the sacred precincts of the Gantry's room.

The primapara of the door trembled beneath the assault that was being launched on it.

Through the heavy wood they could hear the voice of authority. "Open up in the name of the R.A."

All a tremble, Comstock searched his friends' faces for reassurance.

He found none.

Bowdler said, "I don't understand it."

"No point in going back the way we came, the R.A. will have found that by now," Grundy said and his forehead was washboarded with worry.

CHAPTER 5

IF ONLY the R.A. had arrived a little earlier was all that Comstock was able to think. Five minutes earlier and his convictions would have been safe. He'd have been able to throw himself

into the R.A.'s protection and tell all. That way would have meant safety and perhaps a reward.

But now?

Bowdler's bulky body moved toward the door. He yelled, "All right, keep your halo cool, I'm coming."

How, Comstock wondered, could anyone be so brave? No fear showed on Bowdler's granite-like face. None at all. His hand on the door knob, he paused and called back over his shoulder, "Grundy, come here, stand at this side of the door, you, Comstock, stand on the other side. I'll stall him, and if my plan works, you two beat it! Fast! Grundy, you know where to take Comstock!"

"Sure, to Helen's," Grundy said and took up a position at the side of the door. Comstock, knees wobbling, hands sweating, stomach writhing, took up the position indicated for him.

Then Bowdler opened the door. He bowed derisively and said, his tones steady, the words ironical. "Won't you come in and make yourself comfortable?"

It was the same R.A. whose small features and lean hand had menaced them in the saloon.

His halo was bright with anger. His hand had the stun-gun at the ready. The words that came from his mouth were bright with menace. He said, "I

want you three to know that my gun is set to kill!"

Now sweaty-footed fear was walking down Comstock's back. Never had he heard of an R.A. using the death control on his gun. Ordinarily just the threat of nervous stunning was enough to make the most irate submissive.

Long legs spread wide apart, hands on his hips, Bowdler said, "By what right do you enter the sanctum of a Gantry?"

"By the right invested in me by the Fathers and by my warrant from The Grandfather!" The R.A.'s reedy voice was cold.

Throwing his big head back, Bowdler laughed in the man's face. He said, "Well, now, that sounds real important. But does it mean anything?"

Spread in a straight line, as the three men were, the R.A. could only menace one of them at a time. His gun went back and forth in a slow arc.

He said, "Put your hands behind your backs and come quietly."

"Throw ourselves into the broad lap of The Grandfather, eh?" Bowdler asked and he seemed to be enjoying himself tremendously.

"Of course. He understands and He will judge your case according to its merits!"

"And having understood our case, and having judged it in ad-

vance, He will have us 'removed' for the good of society?" Bowdler asked, but it was more of a statement than a question.

"That remains to be seen," the R.A. said.

"Humph," Bowdler grinned, "if we play it your way, our remains will be all that will be seen. No, thank you. I don't think I like that method at all!"

With no warning and with no change of expression, Bowdler waited till the R.A.'s gun was pointed at Grundy at one end of its slow arc, then threw himself in a berserk charge straight at the R.A.

The R.A. hurriedly swung his gun back and pulled the trigger. He missed, and by that time Bowdler's long arms were around his knees and he was being dragged down to the soft carpet on the floor.

At the precise moment that the R.A. began to fall, Grundy gestured for Comstock to follow him and ran through the door. It took a second or so for Comstock's frozen muscles to obey his frightened brain, but then as the R.A. brought the gun up level with Bowdler's forehead and pulled the trigger, he ran.

The last sight he saw, as he chanced a look over his shoulder, was the sight of all intelligence draining out of Bowler's face. The charge had hit him.

Slamming the door on the scene, Comstock ran, and as he ran he screamed to Grundy, "The R.A. killed him! He killed Bowdler."

Ten feet away the news made Grundy pause and almost stumble, but Comstock saw him recover and then run on. He yelled back to Comstock. "Tough. He was a good guy. But we gotta keep goin' or we'll be killed too."

The endless corridor through which they were running was dank and it was dark. There was no curve, no up or down. It was simply a black hole through which they ran and ran, and kept on running. When Comstock thought that he would never be able to breathe again, that his muscles could no longer bear his weight, that he must slump in a helpless heap and wait for death, he heard Grundy snap, "Ten feet more."

The words shot a new charge of adrenalin into Comstock. With a last surge of strength he darted after his friend's back. As a matter of fact he lunged full tilt into it because the darkness was so complete he could not see his hand before his face.

Grundy grunted, "Hold everything. I have to find the latch."

Another moment that seemed to stretch out far beyond the end of eternity and then, just as Comstock's strained ears heard

footsteps running behind him in the dark. Grundy said, "There it is." And a door opened. Beyond was further darkness, but it was not as complete as the stygian blackness they were leaving. Falling through the doorway, Comstock fell to his face as Grundy slammed the door behind them

"That'll hold the R.A. for a minute and that's all we need."

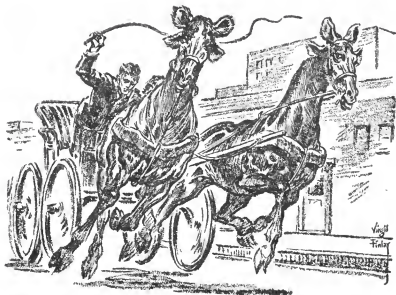
Lifting his head, forcing his trunk upwards from the ground, Comstock saw that they had come out on a street . . . he looked at it while his breath raced in and out of his tortured lungs . . . the street was familiar. It was the one that housed the b . . . l to which he repaired once a month.

At the curb waiting, was an R.A.'s carriage. The team of astrobats waited patiently in harness, their too-pointed faces and four ears heavy with menace towards anyone who dared to approach them.

Staggering to his feet, Comstock felt Grundy's arm go around his shoulders. Grundy half carried, half pushed him into the carriage.

"But . . . we can't go in this!" Comstock gasped. "You know the penalty for even going near an R.A.'s carriage!"

A final push shoved Comstock onto the seat. Grabbing the wicked metal electro-whip, Grun-



dy forced the recalcitrant astro-bats into what those crochety animals considered a gallop.

"The first person who sees us will call for help! We're not even dressed like R.A.'s!" Comstock said.

Grundy was kind. He said patiently, "Our halos will protect us."

LOOKING at Grundy's head, Comstock half expected to see the silvery sheen of the mark of an R.A. But there was no sign of one.

"Are you insane? We have no halos. Only the R.A. has them."

Whipping the team expertly, Grundy said, and his words were

a sigh, "You have much to learn, Comstock. There are no halos except in the eye of the beholder."

"What does that mean?"

The carriage was racing by the b.....! now and Comstock was amazed to see the madame, who was standing in the doorway, make the sign of reverence and obeisance as they raced by.

"The halos don't exist. They're just post-hypnotic suggestion implanted in our minds when we're kids. We're conditioned to see the halos when we see an R.A. We're in an R.A.'s carriage now and so anyone seeing us will see our halos. It's as simple as that. But then, you don't know what hypnotism is, do you?"

"No." Comstock said this humbly and at the moment he felt that he knew nothing at all. He turned and looked backwards.

Down the street behind them, the R.A., his halo shining brightly, like a good deed in an evil world, was pointing his gun at them. Comstock said, "The R.A. found the door. He's going to shoot us!"

Wordlessly, Grundy flicked the whip over the beasts' backs. The carriage swerved and carried them around the corner. Comstock could not tell if the R.A. had fired and missed, or had held his fire, for of course a stun-gun is silent as the grave, and only affects the human nervous system.

Careening along the quiet streets Comstock found time to feel deep and real sorrow for Bowdler. It still did not seem possible that anyone could have been as brave as all that. Aloud he said, "Bowdler sacrificed himself for us, didn't he?"

Grundy nodded, his eyes alert, scanning the road ahead, for what? Comstock wondered.

"When you are daring what we are, you must be prepared for instant sacrifice," Grundy said.

"Hadn't we better give up?" Comstock asked. "Two of us against the entire world seems ridiculous. What chances have we?"

"None if you feel that way.

But if you feel as Bowdler did and as I do, that it is worth anything to be a man, then it is worth while. Any chance is worth taking."

Grundy's tone changed. He said, "When I turn the next corner I'll slow the team down. When I do, jump out."

Jump out? What new madness was this? But before he had a chance to argue, Grundy had pulled hard on the bits and snapped, "Now!"

Rolling free of the carriage on his side, Comstock saw even as he fell to the ground, that Grundy had thrown himself out of the other side of the carriage.

The team raced on, dragging the empty carriage banging and clattering at their multiple heels.

Shaken, bruised, sore from head to foot, Comstock said as Grundy pulled himself to his feet. "Why did you do that?"

"Let the R.A.'s keep their radio tail on the carriage. A lot of good it'll do them!"

Grundy again helped him to his feet, and then said, "Follow me."

Comstock's mind was a whirl again. What was a radio?

The street was even quieter than most in Comstock's city. Small houses, a decent distance apart, lined the lawns where the purplish grass sparkled in the light of the twin moons.

The house that Grundy stopped in front of was identical with all the others. He took a key from his pocket and opened the door. Then he called out, "Helen!"

COMSTOCK had come a long way at that moment when he had waited futilely for The Grandfather's wrath to strike him dead, but he had not come to the point where he could watch the indecency of the scene that followed. Averting his eyes as the young girl entered the room, he wished desperately that he might be struck deaf so as not to have to hear what followed their entry.

In the first place she was obscenely young, not more than twenty-five. In the second place her ugly young skin was completely without wrinkles. In the third place she threw her round young arms around Grundy's neck, and in the fourth place she kissed him hard and long on the lips and in the fifth place she crooned to him love words that no one should ever be forced to hear.

"Darling, darling, darling," she said over and over again. "I've missed you so terribly, I've been so worried . . . but it's over and you're near me again."

"Dearest," Comstock could not help hearing Grundy say and his opinion of the man descended

sharply, "My loveliest sweetheart."

Then their lips met again in a sustained and prolonged bit of pornographic action that left Comstock weak. Worse perhaps than the way they were pushing their lips against each other was the way they had glued their bodies together.

He coughed trying to bring them back to their senses.

Grundy broke away from the girl. "Thank The Grandfather," Comstock thought, and then bit his lip as he realized that he no longer had the right to call on that name . . .

The girl said, "But where's Bowdler? Darling, what's happened . . . he hasn't been . . . he isn't hurt?"

"Worse, dear." And the man touched her hair. The sight made little horripilations go up and down the hair on the back of Comstock's head.

"He's not dead?"

"Yes, my darling, but he died bravely trying to save us."

She bent her head reverently and Comstock was pleased to see that even so brazen a hussy was still not lost to all the common decencies.

Grundy cleared his throat and made an obvious effort to change the subject. He said, "I'm sorry, I've forgotten to have you meet our new friend." Grundy introduced them.

Horror piled on horror. Comstock's face whitened as the young girl walked to him, took his hand, shook it, and then impulsively kissed him on the cheek.

Thank Grandfather she stopped after an interminable moment and turned back to Grundy. She asked, her voice low and shaken, "But dearest, oh my dearest, what are we to do now? Bowdler was so strong, so sure of himself; he knew so much more than we do of what is really happening in this sick world of ours . . . what are we to do?"

There, it was happening again. Comstock averted his shocked eyes as Grundy put his hand on the girl's wrist and said, "You are to do nothing, my love. You'll stay here in safety. You know that Bowdler and I decided that this is a man's job, and it must stay that way. I'll take no chance of risking your lovely skin . . ."

Then he turned to Comstock and said decisively. "There's no use waiting any longer, taking chances, risking death the longer we wait. We'll eat, rest a bit, and then, we'll risk all!"

"You mean . . ." The girl let her voice fade away.

"Tonight, in half an hour," Grundy said, his face set and stern. "Comstock and I will go before the Board of Fathers and challenge The Grandfather!"

Some of his resolution faded

and he said more quietly, "But how I wish Bowdler were with us. We three might have stood a better chance. But he had set the time as tonight, and I'll not be false to his trust."

Half an hour, Comstock thought dully. It wasn't long to live . . . not long enough at all . . .

CHAPTER 6

IN ONE way the half hour just vanished. In another, it lasted longer than all the rest of Comstock's life put together. While he stood in the doorway, his back to Grundy and the impassioned scene that Helen and Grundy were enacting as what might be their last farewell, he wondered how thirty minutes which had seemed to go on so long, seemed to fly past so quickly.

He could hear Grundy almost moan, "Helen thy beauty is to me as . . .", and then harsh and strident, drowning out all other sound, seeming like the sound that was the ultimate that human ears could ever bear to hear there came an enormously amplified voice.

Comstock had never heard The Grandfather speak, and yet, now hunching himself into a pre-natal ball, his hands pressed tight against his ears, he knew that no other voice could have held that command, that awe-inspiring tone, that this voice held which

now threatened to deafen him permanently.

The words that smote at Comstock were, "I am displeased."

Grundy ran to Comstock, gripped him by the shoulders, pulled Comstock's hands away from his ears and roared, "Follow me! They've got a speaker hidden someplace near here. I never knew they'd found Helen."

The girl's face was washed clean of every emotion but that of anger. She stood at Grundy's side, her hands on her hips and the words she spat out, hurt Comstock's ears even more than the larger than life roar of The Grandfather.

She said, "What a cheap trick!"

"Darling, I can't leave you here now. You must come with us!" Grundy's face was tortured.

"I know," she assented and waited for his orders.

Somehow Comstock forced himself to his feet. He would not, could not, allow himself to be shamed by this girl child. It was unmanly.

The voice of The Grandfather said, "My grandchildren are being naughty. I do not like this conduct. I am afraid, very afraid that you three need punishment."

The tones mumbled a long time after the words were no longer separable. It was like the aftermath of thunder. Comstock

moaned in horrified torment.

All his fears were back. The Grandfather was omnipotent just as he had always been taught. And yet, and yet . . . that little canker of doubt in the back of his head kept muttering, if that were so, how could the girl have called it all a cheap trick? Were there even more things, that he, Comstock, did not understand?

As far as his fevered eye could see there was no sign of humanity. Comstock knew that behind the drawn blinds of the houses on the street people like him were huddled in fear, hoping desperately that the voice did not refer to them.

Grundy said, "If they've got a speaker planted near here, that means we're under surveillance."

"Of course," Helen agreed, "that's obvious. What do we do about it?"

"I wish I'd never gotten you involved in this, dear," Grundy said.

"I'm glad. For if you hadn't, we'd never have had what little we have had out of life. I think it's been worth it, and more."

The smile on Grundy's face was so radiant, the renewed courage he clearly had received from what she said, made Comstock think that perhaps Bowdler had been right, perhaps there were indeed rewards for being a whole man.

Grundy blew a kiss to Helen, and then a smile that oddly enough reminded Comstock of Bowdler crossed his face. He walked from the entrance of the house out into the center of the street. Then, feet separated, again so like Bowdler, his hands on his hips, he threw his head back and looking at the sky he roared out a challenge.

"Come and get us! Don't treat us like sorry grandchildren, come and get us. I dare you!"

Across the street Comstock saw a curtain being pulled slightly to one side. Then a frightened eye stared out. The Grandfather or his representatives would have to answer Grundy's challenge, he realized with a little thrill of pride.

The powers-that-be dared not allow the people to see a man defy The Grandfather.

It was, Comstock thought, rather a wonderful thing to be a rebel.

But the feeling passed quickly when, with a speed that defied his understanding, a kind of vehicle he had never before seen appeared roaring out of the distance. It had four wheels, and a carriage-like body, but no team of astrobats drew it. Instead it seemed to be propelled by magic. It was rather a noisy magic for a series of explosions seemed to come from the front of it constantly.

Above the low roar of the carriage's explosions rose the voice of The Grandfather. "I have dispatched a chariot for you. Beware my wrath and come quietly."

Helen looked jubilant. She said, "We're forcing their hand. This is the first time in centuries they've found it necessary to use a car!"

"If we only had more strength," Grundy said, "I'd almost be optimistic. We sure have them worried."

Then the object Helen had called a "car" drew up in front of them and a door opened. Four of the leanest, hardest R.A.'s that Comstock had ever seen pointed stun-guns at the three of them. The man who sat behind a wheel said, "Get 'em in quick. No sense in having too many of these slobs see this car."

Comstock flashed a look of inquiry at Grundy.

"Sure let's join them. It's easier to be driven there, than to have to walk as I'd figured!"

The vehicle was obviously not designed to hold seven people and since the four R.A.'s drew away from Helen with the same kind of sick disquietude that Comstock had felt, the small remaining space left for Grundy, the girl and Comstock made them all wedge in rather tightly.

Helen's flesh was soft and warm, Comstock realized with a

shock, and the clean, sweet smell of her in his flaring nostrils was a warning that Bowdler and Grundy might well be right. There was something about young women . . . something unlike the emotion he had felt on his monthly visits to his elderly lady friends in the b. . . . l.

"The "car" raced through the deserted streets with a speed that would have scared Comstock out of a year's growth if he had not had so many other larger worries tearing at him.

MOST baffling to him was the fact that despite the fact that they were going before a tribunal which would sentence them to death, Grundy was able to lean closer to Helen and whisper to her a poem that Comstock had never heard before and the words of which failed to make any sense.

He was saying, "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?"

And then he k. . . . d her.

In the Grandfather's "car" with four R.A.'s right there, Grundy was k. . . . g Helen!

It was flabbergasting to Comstock and in a strange way that he could not quite understand he felt a little pang of jealousy. He found he would have liked to have had a Helen next to him . . . Someone young and brave . . . and soft . . . and warm

. . . who smelled like the girl now pressed so close against him.

Something of what he was thinking must have communicated itself to the girl for she turned from her beloved and said, "Poor Comstock. It's not as though you were all alone. We're with you!"

Then her full-soft lips were pressed on his forehead.

The blood pounding into his head made his face flare crimson.

Sounds of disgust from the four R.A.'s made him angry instead of upset as they might have.

What did they, poor fools, know of the feelings of a rebel? Of a . . . hero?

The kiss buoyed him up all the way to the House of the Fathers. But then, when the ominous, tall, round building rose up in front of them, and he could see the two circular perispheres at the base of the trylon-like structure, fear returned.

In one of the completely round low buildings was the House of the Fathers. The other, on the right hand side, was the meeting place of the Elders. And high above in the very tip of the tall round building was The Grandfather's Retreat.

It was awe-inspiring because never before had he been closer to it than a mile and that only on those days sacred to the memory of The Grandfather.

The car jolted to a halt right in front of the trylon.

The R.A.'s hustled the three of them out of the vehicle. Where were they to be taken? Comstock watched wide-eyed. Their guards took them past the door on the right. So they were not to be taken before the Elders!

There was no sign that they were going to be forced over to the left. That meant they were not to go before the Fathers.

Instead they were marched through the center door.

Breathing became almost impossible for Comstock. They were being taken into The Grandfather's Retreat.

Never before had he heard of such a thing happening. But then, of course, never before had anyone challenged The Grandfather. At least not to Comstock's knowledge.

Inside the doorway there were broad windows. Through one of them Comstock could see into the room where all the Elders were met in solemn conclave. Their aged incredibly wise faces were heavy with responsibility. All of the seamed faces were turned so that the Elders could see the three who had defied authority.

The force of all the red-rimmed eyes staring at Comstock was enough to turn his knees to jelly. Instantly Grundy was at his side, words of encouragement on his lips.

He said, "Forget the old codgers. They're so senile they don't even know what's happening."

In some way Grundy's blasphemy was like a jolt of fresh air, or a couple of corpse revivers. With the thought of liquor, Comstock suddenly realized that he should be sick. His heart should be bothering him. It had been ages and ages since he had had a drink. And yet, despite all the alarums and excursions, his heart had not bothered him. That was odd . . .

But all thought, and almost all consciousness ebbed away when that voice came thundering down.

It said, "Take them before The Fathers before you bring them to me!"

The R.A.'s paused in their tracks and then changed the direction in which they had been going.

Ahead was the biggest door that Comstock had ever seen. Discreetly lettered on it was a sign. It read, "The Fathers."

The leader of the R.A.'s opened the door and then Helen, Grundy and he were pushed through the door into an anteroom. It was small and on the far side of it was an even bigger door than the one by which they had entered.

All around the walls of the little room were chairs.

Comstock realized with horror that the door was all that sep-

arated them from the united might of the Fathers. They must be meeting in solemn conclave, deciding what should be done with the three guilty ones.

And then the R.A.'s left, their halos shining more brightly than Comstock had ever seen any R.A.'s halo shine.

The three were alone.

The Fathers in the next room, and above all brooding in titantic majesty was The Grandfather . . . waiting . . .

Helen sat down, crossed her legs, with a flourish that revealed not only her slim a . . . s but, Comstock gulped as he watched in awed fascination, he could see her c . . . s! They were round and full.

Throwing himself into a chair next to her, Grundy said, "It's their next move, blast them! I hope they hurry it up!"

Unable to do anything but pace back and forth, sneaking an occasional look at Helen's l . . . s, Comstock brooded about what had happened to him.

Nightmarish in essence, he yet wondered whether it hadn't been worth it. He was no braver than ever, but there were new emotions, new sensations raging through him. After all, he was a man. And as a man, he was, when all was said and done, capable of being a father. For that matter right at that moment, and looking almost boldly at

Helen's c . . . s, he felt that he would kind of like to be a real Father! Not with Helen, after all she was Grundy's, but with some other girl like her . . .

He had not ever felt that way about any of the elderly ladies he had seen, and certainly never with the woman he visited once a month.

Turning he faced the door behind which the Fathers were sitting and considering his case. The arrogance of them! To think that if his friend's hypothesis was correct, these men had their pick of all the young girls on the planet with whom to . . . Even then, he could not think the word, but the anger was real.

He still could not watch when Grundy k . . . d Helen and touched her, but he found that it was for a different reason.

Then Helen gasped and Grundy swore, and Comstock turned to look in the direction of their gaze.

The door of the Fathers' room had opened.

And through it walked Bowdler. Big as life!

CHAPTER 7

BOWDLER's smile was as warm as ever, and his face was just as alive as it had been before Comstock saw it glaze in death. He said, "Take it easy, kids. I'm alive. Really I am."

Then all three, Grundy, Helen and Comstock spoke at once, their words garbled, their tones excited. Bowdler held up one meaty hand and said, "Hold everything. The R.A. lied when he said that his stun-gun was set to kill. That's all there is to it. I came to shortly after you both got away."

Grundy and Helen were at Bowdler's side, Grundy pump-handling his friend's hand, Helen hugging him with relief. But Comstock stood off to one side and considered this miraculous return from death. Why, he wondered almost coldly, had the R.A. lied? What function would it serve? Had it served?

Bowdler must have felt Comstock's thoughts for he turned and said, "There was a reason, Comstock. Truly there was, and a good one."

The seriousness in Bowdler's tone made Helen and Grundy draw back a little. Then they retreated in sudden panic at his next words, for Bowdler said, "You see, my friends, I ordered the R.A. to lie to you."

Perhaps because Grundy had been a friend of Bowdler's longer or perhaps because Comstock had been pushed as far as a man can be pushed, for whatever reason, or combination of reasons, Comstock suddenly found himself for the first time in all his wild adventure taking the initia-

tive. He snapped, "No one can give an R.A. an order but a Father!"

Bowdler smiled, "That's right, Comstock. Good work, boy. You *have* come a long way."

It was Grundy who gasped, "Then you are a Father?"

Nodding, Bowdler said, "Yes."

Before they could question Bowdler any further, he suddenly put his finger to his lips in the immemorial gesture for silence. Then he pointed at the closed door behind which the Board of Fathers were sitting in solemn conclave. Bowdler whispered, "We've only got a split second before you are called up before them."

"What can we say, what can we do?" Grundy pleaded.

"I thought," Bowdler said, his brow furrowed with worry, "that I'd be in a position to fight for you all by this time. But my plan didn't work out. They're furious at your effrontery. I'm afraid if you go before them now they'll sentence you to death."

Comstock looked around him wildly. Life had become much more sweet to him in the last few days and he didn't intend to give it up without a battle.

Bowdler said, "If I could only spirit you all away to safety . . ."

That was when the door opened. A uniformed emissary of the Fathers, his regalia fright-

ening in its black severity, came through the doorway. He was to the left of Comstock.

He barked, "Follow me." Then, sure in the arrogance of power, he turned his back on Comstock and the others and began to walk back towards the door. It was obvious that the thought that they might not follow him had not even crossed his mind.

Grundy made a signalling motion to Comstock, a chopping gesture with the side of his hand that puzzled Comstock mightily. Seeing that Comstock was baffled, Grundy brought the edge of his hand down in the same chopping motion on Helen's neck. Then he pointed at the black garbed man who was leading the way into . . . death . . .

Once the idea penetrated Comstock's considerably bemuddled mind he sprang into action as though he had been trained in violence all his life. Leaping closer to the emissary he whacked the edge of his hand down on the nape of the man's neck.

As he did so, Grundy and Bowdler ran to join him. They caught the man before he hit the ground. Comstock stood stock still, and looked at his hand in some wonder. The idea! His hand had struck down a member of the inner circle of the Fathers' Right Arms! Incredible!

As though the whole thing had long ago been rehearsed in its

entirety, Helen pushed the door closed, hiding completely what had just happened.

All the while that Comstock stood and gloried in his own daring, the others were busy ripping the uniform from the unconscious man's body.

Bowdler was grunting from the effort, his big beefy face almost vermilion with strain. He had yanked off the guard's trousers and was now holding them up in front of Grundy, as if estimating how they would fit.

"Nope." He grunted, and then threw the pants to Comstock. "They'd never fit Grundy. You'll have to wear the uniform."

Still bemused, for otherwise the very thought of doing what he was, would have made him faint, Comstock stripped off his own trousers, in front of Helen! and put on the guard's. While he was busy dressing, Bowdler said, "The only thing I can see to do, is for you to try to escape from here, with Comstock masquerading as an R.A. Meanwhile, I'll join the Fathers and see if I can distract them long enough to let you three get away."

"But where will we go?" Helen asked, "They've found out about me, and my house."

"I know, I know," Bowdler grunted impatiently. "Let me think."

By that time Grundy had helped Comstock into the form

fitting black jacket. The final touch was the menacing slouch hat that went with the uniform.

Comstock drew himself up proudly. This was living! Of course, he thought, and the idea made him deflate his chest rapidly; if they were caught now, their deaths would be even more unpleasant . . . But he patted the evil little stun-gun at his hip, and tried to feel very, very brave.

The man on the floor, looking highly undignified in his long underwear, and not at all menacing, stirred uneasily, and moaned. Bowdler bent down and rapped him on the point of his chin, and the man relaxed into deep unconsciousness again.

Not willing to be put off any longer, Comstock asked, "Bowdler, since you're a Father, why are you doing what you're doing?"

"No time for that, boy, no time at all."

Grundy added his curiosity, "But we must know, Bowdler, we can't keep up this insane hare and hounds chase unless we know what's going on!"

Bowdler pushed Grundy and Helen towards Comstock and snapped, "Later, later. For now, all I can say is that I am fed up with the unfairness of the way our world is being run. I went out into your world to try and find rebels to use as the nucleus

for a revolution. But there's no time now for any further explanations. Listen to me carefully. The guards at the front entrance would recognize you, Comstock, even in that uniform, so you must escape by the back exit. To get to it, turn right when you leave here, go to the end of the long hall, and then turn left, follow that passage to its end and then turn right. That'll lead you to the garage. Commandeer a car and go to 14 Anthony Comstock Road. I'll join you as soon as I safely can."

"Right, left, right." Grundy said. "Okay, Bowdler. I hope you can join us soon!"

"Before you go," Bowdler said, "Sock me on the jaw."

Grundy asked, "Hit you? Why should I?"

"Do as he says," Helen said impatiently. "He has to have an alibi for our escape."

Closing his eyes, Grundy lashed out suddenly. His fist missed Bowdler's chin and landed high on his cheek near Bowdler's eye. He snorted in annoyance, but said, "All right, all right, that'll have to do. Now run!"

Throwing himself on the thickly carpeted floor he imitated the truly unconscious man who was slumped there.

Lifting his head he said, "Beat it! Go on . . . hurry!"

They left.

COMSTOCK chanted to himself over and over again as they walked down the long impressive marble corridor, right, left, right. What was behind the doors they passed? Would he ever know? Each one seemed more menacing than the one before it. And somehow, high above him, Comstock could feel the brooding majesty of The Grandfather. Surely here in the buildings that were sacred to Him, The Grandfather must know what they were doing. His knees shook and his stomach turned over as he thought of the effrontery of what they were doing.

If one of the doors that lined the corridor had so much as squeaked, Comstock thought, he would die. He knew it. He knew his weak heart would not be able to stand the strain and that was all there was to it.

The silence that surrounded them was harrowing.

Grundy, his arm around Helen protectively, kept his eyes busy searching, hoping against hope that no one would see them, question them . . . or suspect them.

Comstock's palm and fingers were sweaty with the agony of the grip he had on the butt of the stun gun.

Ahead of them was the end of the corridor and no one had seen them.

Taking an even deeper breath, Comstock strode to the left. The

other two followed in his footsteps. This corridor was shorter, he was grateful to see, and the one that went off to the right at the end of it seemed lighter. At least it did not seem quite as dark and gloomy as the way they had come.

And then they had come to the end of the last hallway and ahead was the door that Bowdler said led to escape. But the highest hurdle, Comstock thought, was still ahead. They had to steal an auto from a garage. He had learned that the astrobatless-carriage that had conveyed them there was called an auto, but what in the world was a garage?

He hoped it wasn't some new horror.

All three of them froze. The door that led outdoors was opening.

Grundy had to nudge Comstock in the ribs to make him move. For the sight of a platoon of black-garbed R.A.'s stretching off into the middle distance that was revealed when the door opened had been enough to end any and all thoughts of resistance on the part of Comstock.

The leader of the R.A.'s snapped a salute at Comstock which he answered only when Grundy's elbow dug deeply into his rib cage. The R.A. Leader said, "Reporting to The Fathers!"

Comstock made a gesture that

he hoped would look as if he was giving the Leader permission. It was obvious from the way the man was behaving that he thought Comstock outranked him. And as Comstock, Grundy and the girl passed the platoon, it occurred, to Comstock that any R.A. who was employed at this fountainhead would of necessity outrank any others.

The platoon stood at frozen-faced, stiff-backed attention as the trio left the back door and walked across the greensward toward a building that Grundy whispered to Comstock must be the garage.

When they were out of earshot of the platoon, Comstock sneaked a look back over his shoulder. The black-garbed men, like automatons, were marching into the building.

Grundy said, "Okay, so we've found the garage, but how are we going to drive the car? That's the next big question."

Comstock was too relieved, first by the fact that they had escaped the R.A.'s and second by the fact that the garage had turned out to be just a building, to take on any new worry for a while.

Smiling a little, Helen said, "Hold on, Bowdler said we were to take a car, therefore, it must be easy to drive one; or else we'll have to force an R.A. to drive it for us."

"I suppose you're right," Grundy said, but he sounded dubious.

"If we make an R.A. drive it for us, that'll mean we're stuck with him," Comstock said. "I don't think we want one of them around, do we?" Then he saw a black uniform and he snapped, "Quiet!"

The man saluted as, Grundy in the lead, Helen following him, and Comstock bringing up the rear, they entered the "garage". Comstock said, "I have been ordered by the Fathers to take these prisoners on a journey."

The black uniform was dirty and greasy which surprised Comstock. He'd never before seen an R.A. who was not spotless. However, when he saw what the man had been working on he was no longer surprised. The man waved a filthy hand at an object on four wheels and said, "Try this one. I'm having a lot of trouble with these blasted things." He shook his head. "If we only had some new parts. I don't know how much longer I can keep stealing parts from one car and putting them in another."

Comstock had to make a decision. His hand still on his stungun, he said to Grundy, "Get behind that wheel, and let's get started."

Slightly taken aback, Grundy gulped and then said, "Yes sir. Right away, sir."

There was no other way that Comstock could see that it could be done. An R.A. would not have driven the car and allowed the two prisoners to sit idly in the back of the conveyance.

The dirty uniformed man, mumbling under his breath, got down on all fours and began to tinker with the underneath part of the "car" he had been working on when they entered the "garage".

That was a bit of luck for it allowed Grundy to enter the "car," get behind the wheel and examine the various controls. Comstock and Helen sat grandly in the back seat and waited.

Finally, after a long wait, Comstock leaned forward and whispered to Grundy, "Better get started before he gets suspicious."

He was a little shocked at the curses that Grundy directed at him. They ended by the man saying, "All right, genius, you tell me what to do!"

The dirty man's legs were all that showed from the place where he was working. Comstock leaned over Grundy's shoulders and said, "What about that key? It seems to be part of the works."

Shrugging, Grundy turned the key. There were a lot of things sticking up out of the floor and Comstock said, "They look like feet would fit on them, don't they?"

Sticking out one foot experimentally, Grundy said, "Hmmm . . . yes, they do."

Then there was a series of explosions, and a sudden jolting start that threw Comstock into Helen's lap.

LATER, when they had learned a bit about driving, they were all very grateful that the "car" had been pointed at the opening in the door when it started, for they knew that they would never have been able to figure out how to reverse it.

Their vehicle bucked and bounced as it roared out through the doorway. It was only after the first thirty seconds of movement that Grundy remembered that the other driver had held his hands on the wheel.

Trying this, he found that the car responded to his touch. Rather delighted, he turned the wheel sharply. Instantly Comstock was thrown off Helen's lap onto the floor of the "car". She landed on top of him driving the breath out of his lungs in a gasp that he momentarily feared was so noisy that The Grandfather, perched high in his tower, would hear.

But the sound of the explosions in the front of the car drowned out all other noises.

Careening down the esplanade away from the frightening buildings, away from the Fath-

ers and The Grandfather, Comstock finally managed to push Helen off of him and get back into the seat. She was grinning excitedly and he found that he too shared in the feeling. In the front seat Grundy called back, "Hey, this is kind of fun!"

It stopped being fun when it became necessary to turn a corner. This was a difficult maneuver and when it was over, Helen and Comstock were again entwined in a manner that was highly indecent. Now that the buildings they had escaped from were receding into the distance, Comstock found that he was rather enjoying the feel of Helen's soft flesh.

It made him blush and his heart must have suffered from the strain, but nevertheless he did, he told himself, enjoy being near her. What a ghastly perversion! To find youth exciting! What would his dear Father have thought?

But then he decided not to worry too much about Father. One thought was uppermost in his mind. He wanted a girl just like Helen. If one could be found.

Grundy yelled above the sound the vehicle was making. "We're almost there. What number house did Bowdler say?"

"Fourteen, I think," Comstock said and he was glad to have a break in the direction that his thoughts were taking.

Next to him, Helen pursed her full lips and whistled. She said, "Take a look!"

The house well repaid a look. It was the closest that Comstock had ever been to a home that belonged to one of the Fathers. Immense, sprawling, with a lawn that was as carefully tended as time and work could make it, crisp bushes, trimmed and shaped, the house was a gem. It was on the side of a hill that sloped steeply downwards.

They drew up in front of it and a new problem arose. Grundy yelled, "Better jump. I don't know how to stop this thing!"

One after the other they leaped from the "car" which, since Grundy did not know how to shift the gears was still in first and was making all of fifteen miles an hour.

Rolling over and over, hands and knees badly scraped, Comstock thought, "There must be a better way than that to get out of a "car". But then, as the vehicle sped faster and faster down the decline of the hill, he said, "Grundy . . . Helen . . . Did you notice anything odd on the way here?"

They were picking themselves up and Grundy was being, Comstock thought, a little too solicitous about Helen and whether she was hurt, so he repeated himself a little more loudly.

"Odd?" Grundy finally said after he had patted Helen in various places, in none of which it seemed to Comstock, it had been likely for the girl to have injured herself, "What do you mean?"

"Don't you realize we didn't pass a single human being all the way here?"

"You're right," Helen said. "That is peculiar!"

Grundy looked about them. There was no one in sight. No one at all. That was not too peculiar, not here, not this near a Father's house, but the other streets should have been full of people . . . It was all very strange.

Down at the bottom of the hill the driverless "car" crashed into a tree. It was the only sound but for their breathing. Helen shivered.

Comstock said, "Let's get in the house. Quickly."

It was one thing, Comstock thought, to have been in a room that belonged to a Gantry, as they had been, but it was a completely different and much more frightening thing to be walking up the path to a house that belonged to a Father, even one like this that belonged to Bowdler who certainly had seemed to be friendly.

They were on the steps of a broad pleasant verandah now, and the entrance to the house

was directly in front of them. The door was white, and had neatly lettered on it, "Enter."

Comstock grabbed Helen's free hand, her other was in the fold of Grundy's arm. Then all of them moved slowly towards the door.

It opened before Comstock could put his hand on the knob.

It swung wide enough for them to see that no one had opened it for them.

From inside the house, a heavy metallic voice said, "Welcome may you be."

CHAPTER 8

PERHAPS the single, most frightening thing in the big living room to Comstock was the fact that the walls were solid with books. The cases ran from the floor to the ceiling and every available space was stuffed helter skelter with books, books and more books. In all his life it is highly unlikely that Comstock had ever seen more than ten or fifteen books at one time, and then only in what passed for a library in his culture.

Why, he thought, there must be thousands of books here. On what subjects could the authors have written? What was there to write that much about? A small hope persisted for a moment that maybe, for some strange reason most of the books might

be duplicates. But that was eradicated when he looked at the odd, mysterious titles of the volumes. There were no duplicates and seemingly the books were divided up into categories. But some of the categories were so strange to Comstock that they passed his ability to comprehend.

What, he wondered, could sociology be? Or anthropology, or psychology, or these massive volumes full of poems . . . not simple enjoyable poems like *Father Goose*, but queer, abstruse ones, whose words made no sense at all to Comstock's reeling brain.

While he hurried around the room blowing dust off the tops of the books he was looking at, Helen and Grundy were concerned with who had greeted them on their entrance.

Leaving Comstock to his perusal of the shelves, Grundy tiptoed out of the room, and then looking in no particular direction, he called, "Hello? Who are you! Where are you?"

The same metallic voice answered, "I am the house. I am here to supply your wants, to feed you and make you comfortable."

When Comstock heard this the shock was too much for him. He swayed, and then sank, with an armful of books, into the deep recesses of an easy chair. A cloud of dust surrounded him.

Instantly a whirring sound emanated from a screened section of the floor and he felt rather than saw the dust disappearing.

Considerably shaken, Grundy came back into the library. Helen said, "What do you suppose it is, darling?"

"Bowdler has told me about robots . . . machines that act almost like we do, but I never, ever, thought that one could run a whole house this way!"

Comstock was willing to accept the robot as he would have the word fairy when he was a child and he was even more inclined to confuse the two things, when at Grundy's mention of being hungry, the door swung open and a wheeled cart entered loaded down with food the like of which none of the three had ever seen.

Sitting in a rather numb silence the three people stared at the food. But then the odors that came from it were too much for them and disregarding the magic of its appearance they ate as they never had before.

That was the beginning, for Grundy and Helen and Comstock of an enchanted month. At first, from minute to minute, they expected pursuit, and capture. But as time passed happily by, as every fleeting fancy was instantly taken care of by the house, they relaxed, and what

was most important, began to devote almost all their waking hours to the books that confronted them on every side, in every room of the house.

No one ever seemed to pass the house, they heard no sounds from outside. They were in a charmed circle, in which every desire was instantly fulfilled.

Comstock was not aware of how and when it happened, but soon he was not even embarrassed at the sight of Grundy and Helen kissing and caressing each other. He no longer wanted to swoon when he heard them exchange love words. But what did happen was that he wanted some one like Helen more and more as time went on.

At first they waited impatiently for Bowdler to put in an appearance, but when days passed and there was no sign of him they ceased to expect him. Then worry began to take the place of expectancy. Suppose, they'd say, suppose he was found out by the Board of Fathers . . . was a Father ever punished? They did not know.

Occasionally, but only very occasionally, Comstock would put his hand to his chest and wonder why his heart disease no longer troubled him, but a question which is unanswerable ceases in some cases to be a question, and he almost forgot about it most of the time.

Then too, the contents of the books which they were devouring with such avidity were so exciting that it almost seemed that there was not enough time in one day for all the reading they wanted to do.

They'd rise in the morning and the instant they sat up in their respective beds, the doors of their bedrooms would open, wheeled carts would enter their room, and the house would serve them their breakfasts.

Having risen, clean clothes would be supplied. Then they'd hurry to the library, discuss what they'd been reading and then, undisturbed except by luncheon and dinner, they'd read, read, read.

SOMETIMES the house would seem to feel that they were devoting too much time to books and it would suddenly and magically produce games and they'd play away an evening.

But when the morrow dawned the lure of the books would call them back.

Their biggest problem was in deciding which of the books they read were fact and what fiction. This was their only noteworthy argument. One morning for instance, Comstock said, "I found a wonderful old book last night filled with reports on criminals. Fascinating! One of them was about a court in some kingdom

or other back on earth where a prince found out that his stepfather had murdered his real father in order to marry his mother."

"I remember that one," Helen said, "It ended with practically everyone in the court murdered."

"That's the one," Comstock nodded.

"Y'know," Grundy said. "I wonder if that was really a report on actual criminals."

"Must have been," Comstock argued, "no fiction writer would have had the prince dilly dally the way that one did, never able to make up his mind what to do. Only in real life do people bumble along that way."

"Mmm . . ." Grundy disagreed, "I think a fine writer might have done just that in order to make the character seem real."

"Prince Hamlet *must* have been real," Comstock said, "He could not have been imagined. No, I'm sure that is fact. But this book I'm reading now, what nonsense!"

He held up Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

"What an imagination! Fantastic!" Shaking his head he went on with his reading.

It was a day or two later when he was reading what he considered another criminal report, the story of a Moor and jealousy, that the idea occurred to him.

Putting down the book, he stared thoughtfully off into space. The idea had just never entered his brain before. Was it possible, he wondered, that he might be able to woo Helen away from Grundy?

Not knowing a thing about how to go about it interfered quite a bit, he found. His flirtation, if you could call it that, began to resemble a game of hide and go seek, for he would lurk in dark corners of the house and wait for Helen to walk by alone.

Then, darting out, he'd try to manufacture love talk, or what seemed to pass for it in the book he'd been reading. One day, having succeeded in scaring Helen half out of her wits, by popping out of a linen closet and appearing at her side completely unexpectedly, he made a groping motion and managed to capture one of her hands. Bending over it, he kissed it.

That surprised Helen almost as much as his darting out of the closet and she was even more surprised when he said, his voice low, so that Grundy in the next room would not hear him, "Helen . . . I . . ." But then his voice vanished and he was unable to go on with the speech he had prepared.

One eyebrow raised so high that it almost succeeded in touching her hair line, Helen considered him. Then she asked,

"Is anything wrong? Do you feel all right?" Then she put her hand on his forehead and said, "Are you feverish?"

The speech that should have come tumbling out of his mouth raced through his mind, he thought, "Yes, I am feverish, burning with desire . . . Nothing can put out the fire but you . . ." That is what he thought. What he said, was, "Um . . . I guess I *am* feeling sick. I think I'll go up and lay down for a while." Then tottering off he left her there.

Lying down, even with a cool cloth on his head, he found did not suffice to quench the fire that was threatening to consume him.

Returning to his reading he found that on occasion, earthmen had murdered the men who stood in the way of their desire. Then it was that he began to trail Grundy instead of Helen. He'd stand in a doorway, while Grundy innocently read, and think of ways to kill his friend. Poison, he found in his reading, was one of the commoner ways of removing the other lover. That would have been fine and he'd have been glad to poison Grundy but for the small fact that he didn't have the vaguest idea what poison was.

And, what if he killed Grundy and even then Helen didn't fall in love with him? That was a big factor and one that succeed-

ed in baffling him for quite a while. Perhaps, he decided finally, he'd better make sure she at least liked him before he went to the slightly extreme extent of murdering his friend.

But before he could take matters of any kind in hand, there came an interruption in the even tenor of their ways. Precisely a month after they entered Bowdler's house, the door opened and Bowdler came through the entrance, a broad smile of inquiry on his heavy face.

He asked no questions about how they were making out, he told them nothing about what he had been doing. Instead he asked, "Has she arrived yet?"

"She?" The word was chorused by the trio.

"Yes," Bowdler said, his expression changing and worry showing on it. "She should have been here by now if she escaped from the R.A.'s." Shaking his head, he sat down in one of the big comfortable chairs that were scattered all around the library. "She's the best possibility I've found since you three. Courageous, with a real brain in her head. I hope she's not been captured."

GRUNDY, Comstock and Helen stifled the questions which were crowding to their lips, questions about the house, about the books, about the rea-

son for their having been sequestered so long. In the face of Bowdler's worry, their questions seemed picayune.

"When should she have arrived?" Comstock asked.

"This morning. I helped her get away last night, gave her directions, and then turned off the force field that's been protecting the house and you three in my absence. If she doesn't appear soon, I'll have to turn it back on. I can't risk having the R.A.'s stumble on this retreat of mine."

"Force field?" Grundy asked timidously.

"Sure, a smaller version of the thing that the last scientists built to protect our whole planet from interlopers. Unseen, it blankets the whole area around the house in an invisible sheath that keeps anyone from even being aware of the house."

So that, Comstock thought, was why they had heard no one, seen no one passing by.

Bowdler got up from his chair and began to pace the floor uneasily. "It's getting later. I'd better turn the force field back on, even though it means that she'll never get here. Sometimes sacrifice is essential."

Rather to Comstock's surprise, he got to his feet, jutted out his rather insignificant jaw and said, "I'm going looking for her!"

"Good boy!" Grundy said approvingly.

Helen asked, "But how will you manage to get back even if you find her?"

"I don't know. All I know is that I can't rest thinking of someone wandering around at the mercy of the Father's Right Arms."

"I've got it," Bowdler said, slowly, "You go ahead, Comstock. Look for her to the east, down around Puritan Square. That's the direction from which she would be coming, if she's not been captured. Then, at twelve midnight, and twelve noon, I'll turn off the field for exactly thirty seconds each day and night till you return." The if, was unspoken.

"Shall I go dressed in the R.A.'s uniform or as a citizen?" asked Comstock.

"Umm . . ." Bowdler pulled at his lip thoughtfully, then said, "I'd go as a private individual. That way there should be fewer problems."

Helen asked the question that should have occurred to Comstock. "How will he know her?"

"She's about Comstock's height, willowy, red-haired, and instead of the dull apathetic look that most of our fellow citizens have, she has bright green eyes that penetrate right to the core of any problem. You'll know her as a fellow rebel as soon as you see her!"

Comstock wanted to ask how

old she was but he couldn't. He felt that it might reveal the motives that were driving him out of the security of Bowdler's house into the harsh reality of his world which he had grown to hate and fear.

Waving his hand in farewell to Bowdler, Helen and Grundy, he tried to look like one of the heroes he had been reading about. With that image in mind, he threw back his shoulders, took a deep breath, and slammed the door behind him. Then, head held high, he walked straight off the verandah and missed the top step completely.

Floundering, he landed in a heap at the bottom of the four steps.

It wasn't particularly heroic he feared, rising and brushing himself off.

Gulping, he walked out of sight of the enchanted house as quickly as he could. Ahead lay a world of danger, of familiar things that now were menacing, and terrible.

But beckoning him on his way was a picture of a lovely red-haired, green-eyed girl who would fall languishing into his arms when he rescued her from the hands of the enemy.

Thinking about just what ways she would reveal her gratitude carried him along on seven league boots. As a matter of fact before he quite knew how he had covered the distance between the house and Puritan Square, he was there.

The streets were crowded with people but of a lovely red-haired siren there was no sign, no sign at all.

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the BEGINNING

By HENRY HASSE

Illustrated by FINLAY

IN the purely cerebral sense, there was no particular point-of-sequence at which Gral could have been said to Know. The very causality of his existence was a succession of brute obedience to brute awareness, for it

was only thus that one survived. There was the *danger-sense* on those days when the great-toothed cats roamed the valley, and the males-who-will-bring remained huddled and sullen in the caves above the great ledge;

there was the *hunger-sense* when provender was low, and Gor-wah drove them out with grunts and gibes to hunt the wild-dogs and lizards and lesser beasts; and not infrequently there was the other sense, the *not-hunger*, when the bring had been exceptional and there was somnolence after the gorging.

Gral could not remember when he had experienced the latter, for it was the dictate of Gor-wah, the Old One, that who did not bring did not eat—not until the others had gorged. Gral was small, and weakest of all the males. Not often did he bring. *Once* on a spurious moment he had scaled the valley-rim, and came out upon the huge plain where it was rumored the little three-toed horses roamed. And he had seen them, he had seen them! He pursued, armed only with blunt shaft and a few of the throw-stones such as Otah used; but he was less swift than the tiny horses, and his throw-stones fell wide, and it was rumored that here roamed the long-tusked shaggy ones that were larger than the very caves . . . trembling, Gral had retraced his way, to arrive at the ledge and meekly await Gor-wah's word that he could partake of the sinews that night.

. . . *Point of sequence. Causality in action. An atom is dissected, a belly rumbles in hun-*

ger, a star blooms into brief nova; a bird wheels in futile escape, an ice-flow impacts, an equation is expressed in awesome mushrooming shape. These are multitudinous, apocalyptic. They are timeless and equal. These are things whereby suns wheel or blossom or die, a tribe vanishes, a civilization climbs or a world decays.

Or an earlier sun, hot and soft-stroking against leaves. Or a Pleistocene man, smallest of all the males, whose supine acceptance had devolved into laziness . . .

Gral would not have called it laziness; his crude synaptics could not have contained the thought, much less given it relevance. Even later—as Gral-the-Bringer—his only point of relevance was to the Place where the great thing happened.

The Place was a small rocky cleft above the river, not easily accessible . . . Gral found it one day because he dearly loved to climb, though all to be found here were the lizards, stringy and without substance. But this day he found more. It was *warmth*, a warmth immeasurably more satisfying than the caves-above-the-ledge. Here for perhaps an hour the late sun stroked directly in, soft and containing, setting the narrow walls aglow with bright-brushed patterns.

To Gral it was an hour apart. He gathered leaves and placed them here, and here he paused in the lateness of each day though his bring was frugal and his belly would rumble that night. But to *that* he was accustomed, and this was pleasurable.

IT was the time of the thaw. Gral huddled in his Place and welcomed the stroking warmth. He was weary, his forage had been fruitless, his throw-stones wasted . . . would he never master them as Otah and the others? He had confronted a wild-dog and pinned it snarling against rock, he had employed his shaft and got it fairly into flesh, only to have the beast slip off the smooth point and escape. Smooth points—they were useless! Briefly, his mind groped with that but could not sustain it.

So Gral burrowed into the leaves, his anger diminished as he watched with drowsy delight the sun-patterns stroking. And his eyes must have closed, half closed . . .

It was no snarl that brought him back—it was a tread, soft-shod and cautious, very close. The snarl came an instant later, deep-throated with anger and meaning.

Another had found this Place, this warmth, these leaves that were fine for burrowing. Gral

came erect and stared into the visage of Obe the Great Bear; just six feet away he saw the great head that swayed with deceptive gentleness, the amber eyes burning, the twinned mountainous muscle of shoulders . . . and in that quick moment Gral saw something else. Obe stood directly astride the pointed shaft which Gral had left too far distant.

Gral did not breathe. He did not move. Only his hand crept slowly, but already he knew his throw-stones were gone. Once more Obe snarled, and Gral saw those great shoulder muscles slide. His hand encountered the wall, groped desperately; then his fingers found something—a stick, a root, some gnarled thing that protruded . . .

In one rearing flow of motion, Obe launched out in a mighty reach. Gral caught part of that sweeping blow; stunned, he managed to gain footing, and now both his hands were on the protruding object. He wrenched and the thing came free, seeming strange and heavy in his hands. Obe was upon him again, the great paws ready to crush . . . pure terror sent Gral stumbling back, but it was a different instinct that brought his arms once up and then down in a great arc . . .

Once only. He felt a wondrous impact that jarred him to the

shoulders—and then it was a miracle. Obe was no longer upon him. Obe lay half sprawled, roaring with rage, and from Obe's massive head came the crimson life-stuff!

Gral did not question. Avoiding the destructive paws, he leaped in and away, and then in, all the while employing the thing in his hand until Obe's life-stuff had run its course in crimson ruin.

Acceptance came slowly, as Gral sagged in weariness against the wall. He could not believe this thing! Timorously, he approached the great carcass and prodded with his foot. Then he accepted.

Now things were happening inside him—a great turmoil, a throbbing within his chest. Gral straightened; he brought his arms quickly up and around, and the thing-that-slew felt wondrous in the arc. Even better than the throw-stones! It was like—he struggled for the meaning—like an extension of one's self! One threw the stone and yet retained it!

But alas, it was not a stone at all, Gral discovered. He placed the gnarled thing in sunlight and crouched to survey it. This thing-that-slew was but a length of rotting root, frozen at the end with clay and encrusted ice. And already the ice was shattered.

The sun did the rest, as Gral watched in despair; soon there was only soft melting mud and a gnarled stick that would never slay again.

For a long time Gral crouched there, trying to understand. Dimly he perceived, but his mind would not reach. He scowled angrily and flung the useless stick away. There was a thing inside him he did not like, a strange new thing that gnawed and nagged and brought anger again.

It was anger at being robbed of a priceless thing—but the gnawing went deeper.

Wearily, he rose. He began his trek back to the great ledge, to make announcement that his bring this day would be Obe.

OTAH came, and Lak and one other, and together they brought Obe back. No one made remark on the slaying; it was enough that Obe was here! And when Gral came forward at the gorging to take the bringer's share, he merely took and retired, disdaining the great show of prowess and exaggeration which the others used to demonstrate their kill. But he saw that Gor-wah, the Old One, was pleased. Even Otah the Thrower-of-Stones looked at him with envy; it was not often they had Obe the Great Bear; only twice before had it happened, and both times it was Otah who brought.

Gral gorged voluptuously that night. This too was new to his experience, and this he liked. But newer still was the thing he did not like, the thing that continued to gnaw and nag and would not let him sleep.

And next morning, with the valley still gray and murky before the dawn and damp with bitter cold, Gral was gone in advance of the others. He clambered down to the river and there he pursued his way—far along toward the place where it widened into shallows. No thought of bringing today! Instead he searched. He searched the rocky shallows as the sun came shafting, and he was still searching later as it climbed high.

He found the place at last, where the stones were plentiful and of proper size. There he paused; the thing was still angry and prodding within him; Gral could not have known that this "thing-that-prodded" was not anger but a churning impatience, a burning nameless need—that he was in very truth a prototype, the first in the realm of pure research!

But he applied it, knowing remotely what he must do. It was long; it was irksome; he ached all through with the effort but still he persisted. Until at last, from all the stones in the shallows, he had gathered a dozen that pleased him.

These he seized eagerly. He spread them out; he examined; he grunted and grimaced and paused in perplexity. It was difficult to choose when each might do! But he chose, weighing each in his hand before discarding, until finally *one* remained.

He grunted his pleasure, knowing purpose now. The vines! Again he selected carefully. *Tight*, said the thing-that-prodded, *it must be tight or you will have only a throw-stone.*

And so began the long task of arranging stone to shaft, as he brought the vine round and round again. It was crude; his fingers were clumsy and unaccustomed; the vine tangled and tore, and there was no way of fastening. But with each failure he found new ways, until at last it was done.

It was done! A thing of extended strength and weight, at once so wondrous that Gral could only place it before him and stare. He felt a pulsing at his throat, his thoughts went leaping. Obe the Great Bear! Now he could bring Obe many times! Even Otah the Thrower-of-Stones would be in awe!

Gral lifted the thing of his creation . . . and just a little way distant, his glance caught the bole of a tree. *Now this will be Obe the Great Bear . . .* then Gral leapt forward, arm outflung in the arc he remembered.

Truly and without effort the weight went to the mark. It made impact that jarred him from arm to shoulder, but this he did not mind because his weapon's edge brought a great gaping wound to the weathered bole.

. . . the first sound of isolate words across a wire. The initial shock of mushroom-shape above an atoll. The fierce clutch of a weighted shaft newly fashioned . . . man stands always FOR A MOMENT in awe of what man has wrought.

For a moment only. And so Gral stood stark in his moment of awe, truly frightened as he visioned what such a blow might have done to Obe. But Gral was truly man, truly prototype; for the time of one deep breath he felt it, then awe and fright were gone as he exulted.

Once more he brought the shaft up in smooth swing and down in the arc . . .

Alas for Gral—alas for research. Alas for all the effort and application and the prodding-thing within. It was Gral's destiny yet to know that a mere day's effort was only the beginning.

For his second mighty swing did not reach the bole-bark. It reached nothing but air. He felt a sudden lightness as the stone fled from shaft, and he was left

holding a stick trailing vines at the end.

Undaunted, he tried again, and again it happened—the stone went plummeting. A third time he tried, and a fourth. He chose the more pliant vines and strove to make them stay, sought a new way to fasten. The stone would not stay.

Gral mourned, and from the mourning came anger and then a bitterness that rose to blind him. For the rest of that day he tried—he could not have counted the times. A factor was missing—dimly he knew that. The sun was dull red along the valley when he desisted; his hands were raw and bleeding, and seeing that, a scound rose in his throat like grating gravel.

Grimly, he buried his stone there beneath the bole and made his way back to the great ledge. His share of Obe would last yet a day or two. The thought of food was only fleeting, because the anger was still inside him, larger now, demanding now . . . that thing-that-prodded.

OBE was gone at last, both Gral's share and all the rest. Three days were gone and Gral did not try to bring again. But each day he went from the ledge in advance of the others, he went in a hunger he did not heed—to the place of the buried stone.

On the third day he thought that Otah followed, keeping discreetly behind; but he could not be sure. This was not Otah's usual direction. And later, on the far shore across the shallows he saw one of Kurho's tribe from Far End. It was not often that Kurho's people foraged this far, and Gral could not say how long the man must have stood there bold and brazen. When next he looked up, the fellow was gone.

Ordinarily he would have reported this to Gor-way, but the incident was soon forgotten. He continued doggedly with shaft and stone. It was something wild and febrile that drove him now, and he could not have wondered at his own incredible quixotism—he was a million years removed from that! But inevitably his synapses took hold, the neuron links grooved, and to Gral one thought emerged: *the vines would never do.*

And so he came to know where the missing factor lay. He knew it dully and was helpless.

More than helpless, he was hungry. It came with a great gnawing need. On the fifth day it was *Otah* who noticed, and more out of contempt than pity tossed him the remnants of a wild-dog he had brought: the portion was little more than stripped bones and sinew, but Gral accepted without question, crawled to his place on the ledge

and partially assuaged his hunger . . .

The ways of discovery are most wondrous—yet who will dare to say they take precedence over the wondrous ways of the stomach? And the ways are ironic; is it not conceivable that the two should align in devious fruition? For Gral found answer, not in his groping hands, but tangled about his clumsy feet!

The sun came high and hot. Gral emerged from his sleep-place on the ledge, faint and hungry but knowing he must try yet again. He took a step, his feet tangled, and growling deep he reached down and tore at a tough twining substance.

Sinews. Sinews stripped bare by his own hunger, all that Otah and others had tossed him these past days; they were taut and clinging now, unresilient, like the vines of the young trees and yet strangely unlike.

Unlike! Gral stared, as his throat went pulsing. He reached out and touched; one had twined about a rock, was now so fast that his fingers could not cause it to move. For a long time he crouched, perplexed, growling deep as his fingers explored. He glanced up at the sun, and then back, and with that glance two things came together with searing shock . . .

For the very first time, man—a Pleistocene man—had made a clear cerebral distinction of cause and effect.

Gral arose. There was a wild new urgency. Quickly he searched and he found, across all the great ledge, sinews from the gorging which the sun had not yet touched. Some among the tribe stared with immobile contempt, thinking Gral the scavenger was yet hungry. But Gral gathered quickly, and departed, and was soon at the far place by the great bole, where he retrieved his stone and set feverishly to work.

Indeed it was not like the vines! It was easy now, but he was doubly thorough; he made his fingers be strong as he followed the pattern he knew so well. The sinews held, they held! His part done at last, he went out from the trees and placed his shaft where the sun's hot stroke could reach.

And this was perhaps hardest of all—the waiting. Most of that day he crouched and waited and watched, as the sun's work was done; that great bright orb, his ally; he had known times when it was beneficent and times when it was cruel, but now in his need Gral's thoughts were kindly.

Soon it became as if his own kind thoughts and the sun's hot strength were one. The thing-that-prodded now was different,

now it outpoured, gracious to meet his need. He could not have known that this was prayer! And so, by degree and small degree Gral saw the sinews grasp and tighten.

Not until the sun was low, at valley's Far End, did he dare reach out and take his shaft and put it to test. But already he knew! The stone held, and it held, and would continue to hold after many tries. He had fashioned a thing and it was wondrous—his own sole possession—a weapon beyond anything the valley-people had dreamed of—and it was his alone.

A stirring of vague alarm made him pause. He growled deep. The thing-that-prodded churned in a new way, a cunning way, and once again Gral was prototype. This thing must be kept secret! Not yet would he share—not until he became known as Gral-the-Bringer!

. . . he could not have known. Could not have known that this thing he wrought spelled at once Beginning and End: that no such shocking departure remains long sole-possessed, either shaft or fire or mushroom-shape: that with each great thing of man's devising comes question and doubt and challenge and often disaster . . .

Or knowing, would not have cared.



SO now he was known as Gral-the-Bringer! He went alone each day, taking throw-stones which he discarded in favor of his new weapon from its place of hiding. He brought the wild-dogs for a time, but soon he disdained them. Three times more he brought Obe the Great Bear, but would not demonstrate his method of kill. Sometimes he scaled the valley-rim to the great plain, where he slew the three-toed horses whose flesh was sweet and different.

And each time at the gorging Otah watched him—watched sometimes sullen and brooding, sometimes with secret knowing.

And then came a day when *Otah* brought Obe the Bear. Three times in as many days he brought Obe, and on the third time he brought back also the shaft-with-stone, bearing it boldly to make sure that Gral and all the others saw.

With half snarl and half wail, Gral leaped to seize it. Otah might have crushed him with a blow, but Otah waited, looking at him fully. Gral's snarl died in his throat. This was not the weapon he had hidden, but another! Otah had found and copied.

"See this!" Otah grunted. "I slew Obe with this!" And he demonstrated to all the tribe. He was still angry, facing Gral, but he gave credit. "*Gral* used it

first. Gral is greatest among us! But if Gral can use, Otah can use—we will all use!"

He turned to Gor-wah the Old One, and said in the language of monosyllable and gesture: "We must have Council!"

There was Council, and the truth was out. Gral held back nothing in his telling. Gor-wah listened and nodded and grunted, his brow furrowed and he growled deep in his throat.

"A weapon of great magic," Gor-wah pronounced, and he prodded with his fingers at it, almost afraid to touch.

"Arh-h-h!" echoed the males. "A weapon of great magic!"

"Let us have many such," Otah repeated with growl and gesture. "The tribe of Gor-wah will be greatest in all the valley!"

Again Gor-wah grunted, shook his head slowly. "The tribe of Gor-wah seeks only food and peace. This we have. We do well without such a weapon."

"Arh-h," echoed the males. "We do well without."

Gral felt helpless, listening. All attention was now upon Otah and the Old One. "But we will use only for food and peace," Otah pursued sullenly. "Such was my meaning!"

Gor-wah rose, trembling. "Meaning? I will give you meaning. Kurho's tribe at Far End! Already they have taken the

lesser tribes. Each year they come in bold insolence, and only the river separates; in time they mean to take the whole valley. Kurho has declared it!" He spread his hands. "Never again will we know peace, if Kurho learns the way of such a weapon!"

There was pause, a restless unease. And again it was Otah who growled boldly, touching the weapon: "Such is the reason for many of these. Let us make them, and none will dare to come!"

"None will dare!" echoed the Council. But there were both those who said it strong, and those who said in doubt.

Now it was plain that even Gor-wah was in doubt. He was old and he had known this time would come, the time when another took the tribe, and that one would be Otah. But now he stood straight and made pronouncement. "I say no! The risk is too great. You, Otah—and you, Gral—you will destroy this weapon. It must not be used again!"

OF course it was never done. Otah also knew that he must take the tribe, and they looked to him now. Soon Lok had the weapon, then Mai-ak and most of the others, as day by day Gral instructed them in the making. But they used with caution!

Otah reminded them always of the Old One's words, though none of the Far End tribe had been seen near the river for many days now.

Until Mai-ak returned from a journey, to announce he had encountered one of Kurho's tribe. "We exchanged insults. I invited him to come close," Mai-ak explained with amusing gesture, "but the fellow would not. He saw my weapon! I think he would have given all his throwstones to possess it!"

Otah was not pleased. He would have admonished, except that Mai-ak told a story well; besides, Mai-ak was a great hunter.

But there came another such day, and then others. First Lok reported and then Mai-ak again. The reports became frequent. Kurho's men were forever near, watching in silence this new weapon in the hands of the Gor-wah tribe across the river.

And then Mai-ak brought a message . . . there had been another encounter, no insults this time but rather a sullen understanding. Kurho was aware of the new weapon; it made his own people uneasy and restless; such a thing at loose in the valley could only spell threat to all peoples! But, if it was to be, then what the tribe of Gor-wah devised Kurho's tribe would also devise. They would devise more and better!

Otah listened, growled in anger. "Kurho says this? Kurho, who has boasted that he will take the whole valley?" Then he paused and considered sensibly. "Mai-ak, take answer. You will say that we go in peace. Say that never do we intend to cross the river. And say also"—Otah paused, groping—"say also that we shall be ready for any who do choose to cross!"

The Old One nodded approval, but no one saw; and no one saw the dark furrow of doubt like a shadow of doom across his face.

"Kurho speaks big," sneered a young one, new in Council. "We have heard it before, always it is Kurho's tribe who is greatest in every deed . . ." He spat in contempt.

Days were gone, endless days without incident. But the reports came in—a mere trickle at first, and then in great tide. Kurho's tribe had indeed devised. Their weapon had been observed! Dak returned one day in high excitement, stumbling across the ledge from a long day's journey.

"Kurho has devised better! We bring Obe the Bear, but they have now slain the great-toothed one. I saw it, I swear! They slew him easily!" He gasped for breath, then gained his feet and gave them eloquent gesture of what he had seen.

There could be no doubt.

Kurho now had a weapon much more facile, more deadly.

Otah accepted grimly. Now it was he who must prove! He went to work at once, he and Gral, devising a weapon to meet the threat—more sharp-edged and deadly, of greater length and balance. It took days. And days more to seek out the place of the great-toothed ones. Not one but *three* were slain, and it was made certain the word reached Kurho.

But now Otah knew. He knew and was helpless. A frightful thing had been launched and there could be no turning; nothing now but the constant fear, the trap without end, the perilous thing above all their heads . . . and the waiting.

Kurho also waited. True, one thing remained to temper the distrust: sporadic communication had been established, a thing new and yet heavy with pretense, which again like a serpent at its tail spelled mutual distrust. But it was there, begrudging, and all the smaller tribes knew of it too—those scattered ones who were little more than clans. All the peoples of the valley watched and waited, aware of this thing between the two great tribes of Kurho and Otah.

"It is better that we should talk, even endlessly, than to use such weapons tribe against

tribe!" Such was Otah's word to those who grumbled and those who feared, and there was much to indicate that such was Kurho's feeling too.

Indeed it appeared to be so! For the first time, Kurho relaxed his borders at Far End. Occasionally the Otah tribesmen were permitted to enter, welcomed without suspicion—a thing unprecedented! Similarly, select members from the Kurho tribe were accepted beyond the river; they displayed certain prowesses new to the Otah tribe, for in many ways these were a strange and fantastic people.

It seemed to be a beginning. Word went out in secret and still other word returned, in which Mai-ak played a great part. And so, after scores of days it was done: there would be a time of understanding; Kurho, himself, would cross the river to go in person among Otah's people! When this was done, Otah would also cross the river to observe the things at Far End!

But now growlings arose which even Otah could not contain. Kurho should not be welcomed! Kurho must not be trusted! Was not this the man who already had suppressed the minor tribes? Had he not flaunted his aim of one day taking the whole valley?

Nevertheless, Kurho came. He came in all his boast and arro-

gance. The time was not festive—he was made to feel that—but what Kurho felt he did not show. Extravagant point was made that he should see all that he wished! Across all the great series of ledges he was taken, both high and low and length and breadth, to observe the abundance and well-being and extent of the Otah tribe. Through all the near valley he was shown, even to the places of great hunting, that he might see how the tribe of Otah prospered in the Bringing.

Through it all, Kurho made a token show of interest; he twice lost his temper in boast against boast, but he was more often a blunt enigma. He saw much and said little. Those times when he did speak, so extravagant were his grunt and gesture that much was lost.

When Kurho departed at last for Far End, he had implanted a feeling of frustration and one thing more—the disturbing thought that not all of his own boasts were idle!

And now came the time for Otah to cross. It was done so quietly that not many knew he was gone, but soon the reports came: Otah had been received with great clamor and curiosity by the Kurho people, and accorded much honor! Aside from that, the result was much the same,

as Otah saw much and said little and did not once lose his temper. Kurho persisted in his boast and claim, and it was rumored that the two leaders had gone so far as to discuss the weapons!

Rumor was true. Otah returned from Far End and immediately called Council, even as Kurho was calling Council. Little had been gained, little proven; the perilous thing was still there, that monstrous means of death that might come in a moment of temper or reprisal to either tribe. Alas, such weapons were not easily relinquished—and who would be first?

Plainly, the way would now be slow and heavy with suspicion, but a method to abate such a threat must soon be formulated.

On *that* Otah and Kurho were agreed!

SO the two great leaders agreed, and were patient, and twice more there were meetings. So engrossed they became and even enamoured, that they were only dimly aware—

Others in the valley, those so scattered and isolate as to be considered only clans, had long watched and waited—and yearned. Neither the long-shaft weapon nor the way of making were longer secret—so why should they not also have?

Inevitably the reports trickled in. A lone clansman had been

observed near the river, employing one of the weapons crudely devised but efficient. Some days later, one from the high-plateau was seen skulking the valley with such a weapon. Those lone ones, who barely subsisted in the barren places beyond river and cave, nor foraged afield—discreet and fleeting at first but with increased daring as the days went on.

And so fixed were Otah and Kurho that such reports were tolerated. There could be no threat here! True, the way of the making was no longer secret. True, such clan-people had long been despised and neglected and left to their own grubbing hunger—but was it not recognized, especially now, that the tribes of Otah and Kurho would determine the fate of all?

They erred—both Otah and Kurho. Neither would determine, nor would preponderance of weapons determine. It was not yet perceived that such clan-people were not Tribe-People, and thus could not know the meaning of Council, nor weigh consequence, nor realize in their new-found cleverness that a single arrogant act would trigger the first and final avalanche . . .

It came. It came on a day when a lone and hungry clansman found himself a full day's journey beyond the river; he was not of Otah's Tribe nor any

tribe, nor did he know that the two he faced were of Kurho's Tribe. In the dispute over the Bring, so emboldened was he by his weapon newly-fashioned that he used it quick and surely.

He did not again look at the two bodies! Taking up his Bring, the lone one departed quite leisurely, without even the good sense to flee in horror of the consequence.

Consequence came. It came soon, before the sun was scarcely down. It came swiftly without question or council, as word reached Far End that two had been slain. Throughout the night it came in divergent attack, as Kurho deployed a token force near the river and sent his real strength high to the north, across the valley-rim and down upon Otah's people. It was at once attack and reprisal and reason!

And for Otah it was reason! For many weeks past, in test and maneuver of the long-shafts he had looked to the north. Now couriers brought the alarm swiftly, and within minutes his forces were launched—fearless ones who knew each foot of terrain by day or night. Otah led one contingent and Mai-ak the other, strategy being to stem Kurho's strength high upon the valley-rim, deplete the enemy and then join force to hunt down any who sifted through.

It was good strategy, the only strategy—and for a time it went well. Within the hour Kurho's forces were scattered, as attack and counter-attack surged and slashed in wild eruption of the long-shafts. Just as eruptive were the neuro-emotives, as each in his primal way must have known that *this* was the long awaitment, *this* was the grim finality in Kurho's boast and Otah's boast of weapons.

A few sifted through, but were quickly brought down as Otah's drifting rear-guard deployed to their assignments. It became evident early that Otah's tribe was more proficient in the long-shafts!

Alas, mere proficiency would not prevail against force of numbers. Well within the hour Otah knew it, knew with a raging despair that time was not with him, he had deployed too late with too little. Now he knew with consuming clarity, that despite the lulling pretense Kurho's boasts of strength had not been idle boasts!

This was Otah's last bitter thought, and then he was too occupied for cerebral indulgence. For the next minutes he wielded truer than any! Men came and fell, and others leaped and fell, skulls shattered, the life-stuff spurting, before Otah's shaft went spinning away in shattered ruin; he leaped to seize an-

other, employed it in great sweeping swaths against those who still came. Two went down, but two came to fill the gap. In perfect unison, one parried as the other wielded truly to the mark . . .

It cannot be said, with surety, that Otah in that ultimate moment felt pain. It is fairly certain that both finitely and cosmically the initial numbing shock did register; and it may be assumed that he jolted rather horribly at the splintering bite of bone into brain. *But who can say he did not reach a point-of-prescience, that his neuro-thalamics did not leap to span the eons, and gape in horror, in that precise and endless time just before his brains spewed in a gush of grey and gore, to cerebrate no more?*

A MATTER of minutes, now. Both Kurho and Mai-ak knew it. The latter had glimpsed Otah's destruction, and with wild abandon sought to rally his men into the area.

There was no longer an area. There was clash and groan and rush and retreat, there was dark endless rock and a darker sky, from which the very stars seemed to recoil in darkest wonderment at man's senseless assault. The valley-rim yawned, and there Mai-ak made his stand and made it well.

He was unaware that Kurho was no more—that the man of boast was at this very moment a quivering, protoplasmic lump splattered across a dark crevice. A random weapon in a frantic hand had proved to be no respecter of person. Nor did it matter! Decimated as they were, enough of the enemy got through. Once propelled in the insane purpose there could be no stopping, as they descended upon Otah's people who huddled in the caves . . .

For weeks, they had been told that when it came it would be from above, sudden and savage without defense or recourse. Few had believed, or bothered to plot the route to safety. Would not these issues be resolved? Had not their caves been always safe and secure?

Now there was no time for belief or wonder. Within minutes none of Otah's tribe were alive, neither women nor children. Gor-wah the Old One remained, having failed in his exhortations; now he stood quite still, erect and waiting, with arms outflung as the weapons came swarming, and when that final blow fell the expression upon his mouth might have been a grimace or might have been a smile . . .

Nor did the others escape, those at Far End who also huddled and waited and would not

believe. Their caves at the valley-floor were even less secure. Whether it was blinding hate or the bitter dregs of expediency, for Mai-ak and his remnants there was only one recourse now. It had been deeply ingrained!

Grimly they pursued the way, automaton-like, unresponsive now to horror or any emotive. And once again, within the hour the weapons fell.

It was swift and it was thorough.

Methodical. Merciless. Complete.

IT will not be said here when emotive-response returned. Does one return from a horror all-encompassing, or seek to requite the unrequited? Does one yearn for a Way that is no more when deadening shock has wiped it out?

The season of thaw came, and again the great cold and once more the thaw. Both Obe the Bear and the great saber-cats were at large across the valley, and for those few who remained the Bring was not easy now. There was more dangerous pray!

Lone clansman encountered clansman across his path, and there was furtive slinking. Each went silently alone and returned alone to his place of hiding. Bel-

lies growled, but none dared use his weapon except in secret.

Perhaps a few, some isolate few remembered that time of chaos a season ago—but it was fleeting recall at best, as somatic responses rose to blot it out.

It was not to be forever! One thing remained, unasked and unbeknownst, grooved with synaptic permanence in their burgeoning brains. *This was neither beginning nor end: for though Otah's Tribe was gone, bellies still growled. Kurho's Tribe was no more, but the weapons yet remained.*

There could be no beginning or end—for would not new things come, means and methods and ways of devising so long as man remained? Was not this The Way?

Such were Mai-ak's thoughts at the time of the next thaw; when he felt the thing-that-prodded that would not let him be, and his anger became stubborn resolve; when day after day he bent the young saplings, and found a way at last to fasten the sinew.

When he pulled, finally, pulled with all his strength, and with great gloating saw his shaft go outward to a distance never yet conceived. . . .

THE END



ASSEMBLING A

There's a long voyage awaiting man Out There. But even the longest journey begins with a single step.

MAN'S initial effort to break his terrestrial bonds and penetrate the fringes of space, is still limited both in performance and scope. Hampered by the necessity of creating an entirely new technology, he is equally restrained by a fear of his own imagination—a hesitancy to accept the really soaring concepts that the ultimate conquest of space demands. This is due mainly to the limitations of the engineering mind, to that professional conservatism that looks askance at radical ideas and mechanisms as yet unproven in actual practice.

However, like the bird from the egg, all human advance must originate in the airy stuff of dreams, from "screwball" visions which spur more mundane minds into creating the working components that turn dream into actuality. To be of any real value, these prophetic notions must of course, have some basic

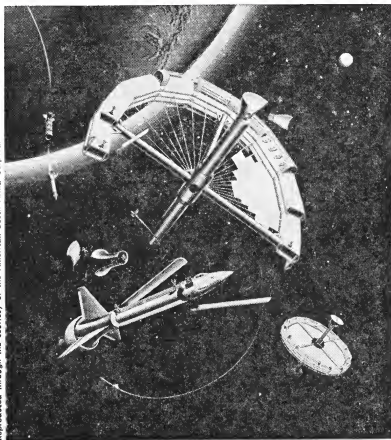
solidity. However weird it may seem at first sight, the dream must rest upon a firm foundation of practical physics and sound engineering principles. Despite the multiplicity of design headaches involved, the idea has to be finally convertible into useful hardware. It is from this sort of realistic imagery, that I present to the readers of AMAZING, a new series of pictorial prophecies—scientifically solid rungs in the ladder of future achievement, up which man will some day ascend to the stars.

At present, we are still in the stage of small beginnings, of tiny electronically controlled vehicles, barely capable of entering and leaving earthly orbits. The moon has been circled and photographed, monkeys and dogs have been successfully returned from space flights and communications satellites are in operation. The first human be-

STATION IN SPACE

By FRANK TINSLEY

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ing has not yet flown in orbit although he is on the verge of trying. When he does, he will be little more than a passenger, carried along for the ride merely to demonstrate that he can make it. The only real purpose of our Project Mercury and of its Russian opposite number, is to prove that man can exist, at least for a little while, in a properly designed space vehicle.

Of course, this is a necessary first step. However, the human brain with its unique capacity for observation, conclusion and decision, will be of no use to science until man is able to live comfortably in space for weeks or months on end, to engage in experimentation and research, to record and transmit his findings back to earth, and to travel to and from his spatial laboratories at will and in reasonable safety. To do all this successfully, we require what has come to be called a "space station".

The space station is a large manned satellite, permanently orbiting around a heavenly body such as the earth, moon, or mars. The particular design shown in this picture, is intended for assembly in an earth orbit, of prefabricated parts rocketed up from an earth base. Extracting usable cold from the icy chill of space and generating heat and electricity from solar rays, it needs no artificial power supply.

Using the principle of the balanced aquarium, it force-grows a basic vegetation such as algae in sunlit chemical tubes, mounted around the revolving rim of the wheel-like structure. In its growth process, this vegetation absorbs the carbon-dioxide exhaled by the crew and produces a plentiful supply of oxygen for fresh air. It also provides a protein rich food for emergency rations—a flour like form of dried algae which recent sun-drying techniques have made quite palatable and which can be flavored and used as a food additive in various ways. In addition to algae, most of our more familiar grains, table vegetables and flowers, can be grown in a similar manner. In the illustration, compartmentalized sets of hydroponic tubes and their supporting brackets, are shown partly installed in upper level "greenhouses".

Revolving around its central axis, the rim is subjected to a degree of centrifugal force governed by its rotational speed. This can be nicely calculated to produce an exact simulation of our earthly gravitational pull. Thus, the crew can move around freely, equipment can be mounted and supplies stored on shelves and tables, precisely as they are on earth. No magnetism is needed, no special shoes or bases, no attractive floors or storage sur-

faces. This normal gravitation, plus its other features, makes our space station self-sustaining in all the necessary basic fields—air, food and power. With a controlled optimum atmosphere, comfortable living quarters, sufficient exercise areas and regular supply and transport service, it is habitable for considerable periods by a single crew. In practice, however, scientific and operating personnel will be alternated at reasonable intervals, as is now done at arctic bases and atomic submarines on station.

THE earth satellite station can be built in any selected orbit, ranging from the altitudes of present day vehicles—a thousand miles or so—on up to an orbit some 22,800 miles out. At this latter distance, the station completes one round trip every twenty-four hours. Thus traveling at the same rotational speed as the earth, the station remains in an apparently stationary spot in the sky and over the same point on the earth's surface. Regardless of the height or speed chosen, the manned space station has a multitude of uses. Operating in an almost complete vacuum with neither storm clouds nor atmospheric dance to dull the cosmic views, it makes a perfect astronomical observatory. Our solar system, the milky

way and more distant galaxies, can be studied, photographed and spectroscoped with a clarity and accuracy impossible on earth. Capable of continuous, 24 hour operation and equipped with recently developed light amplifiers and masers, these orbiting observatories will permit an unparalleled leap forward in man's knowledge of the universe.

As specialized laboratories, the stations provide unique conditions for varied fields of research — physics, electronics, geophysical, weather prediction, communications and many others. Television engineers tell us that with three relay stations, properly placed, they can blanket the world with almost perfect TV transmission. The programs will originate on earth, be beamed to the station, amplified and rebroadcast back in wide, cone-like zones. Coming from above the atmosphere at a near vertical angle, they will penetrate the deepest valleys without hindrance. Present limitations due to hills, mountains and earth curvature, will cease to exist. Among other uses, civil, military or possibly as a U.N. policing device, space stations can serve as staging bases for further exploration of the cosmos. Specialized, electro-powered spaceships can be assembled beside them in orbit and launched for more efficient interplanetary travel.

The space station will be serviced by "Ferry Ships", shuttling back and forth from earth bases. The examples shown in the illustration have atomic powerplants, using liquified hydrogen as an operating fluid. On a single loading of plutonium, these reactors can function continuously for several years. In operation, the heat generated by nuclear fission is conducted through a transfer agent to the rocket's "combustion chamber". Here, a stream of hydrogen gas is admitted, expanded to many times its normal volume and then permitted to escape through the nozzle. As in all rockets, the reaction force of this rearward gas jet, drives the vehicle forward. In passing through the chamber, the gas may become slightly radioactive, so to avoid contamination of base launching pads, the ferry is launched by a powerful, chemical-fuel booster. This is a recoverable vehicle, manned by a pilot and co-pilot, who fly it back to base after it has lifted the ferry to a safe operating altitude. The booster is powered by a girdle of standardized, solid-fuel rockets which can be grouped in various power combinations, tailored to the load lifted. Once beyond the contamination level, the ferry cuts loose, switches on its power and accelerates into the target station's orbit. Meanwhile, the booster glides back to

base and uses its remaining fuel in a tail-down descent. It lands and takes off on tripod landing legs which fold into the three directional fins during flight. (Note trailing edges).

The ferry is designed in the form of a streamlined bar-bell, with a control and passenger compartment in the nose, and its atomic powerplant in the tail. Connecting these units is a long, slender tank in which the liquid hydrogen is stored. In assembling a station in space, the ferry is partly cannibalized. Prefabricated building sections are peeled off from around its center tank and fitted together to form the station's sides and decks. A variety of basic forms are used, all designed to nest one within the other and fit around the tank. In the picture, this operation is shown in the lower foreground, with the partially assembled station above it. In the upper left, an ascending ferry parts company with its booster and in the lower center, another, stripped of its load of building material, returns to earth. A completed station appears in the lower right, with a service ferry locked in the trumpet shaped loading dock beneath it.

LET'S step aboard one of these outward bound service-ferries and see what life in a space station is like. Perched

atop its fat, rocket girdled booster, our two-stage transport looks enormous from the ground level. Squat, heavy legs support the lower component, lifting its circular array of nozzles clear of the concrete pad. Beside it, a tall gantry tower rises on its tracks in a maze of scarlet steelwork. A capsule like elevator whisks us to its top and moving gingerly across a windblown upper deck, we enter the ferry's access hatch. Inside, we find a compact, circular cabin, with a ring of acceleration couches radiating from its center. In company with the other passengers, a couple of blazé young physicists and a prim looking girl technician, we make ourselves comfortable. After a little wait, our pilots enter, check our couch belts and climb the ladder leading to the control compartment. With a buzz of electric motors, the hatch closes and locks and all eyes shift to the ceiling count-down indicator. After another pause, we hear the co-pilot's metallic warning: "Ten seconds to take-off". Alongside the indicator, a red light flashes off, a green one on and an illuminated number nine appears. We brace ourselves and follow the diminishing numerals as they flick across the dial.

The take-off is not as severe an ordeal as we had been led to expect. As the engine roars and the ship gathers way, our bodies are

moulded to the couch padding by an increasing downward push. While the gathering pressure seems irresistible and holds us pinned like bugs on a board, it is never actually painful. It eases a moment as we attain maximum booster speed, then clamps down again as the stages part and the ferry's atomic motor cuts in. Again, the pressure eases, gradually dying away as our ship reaches terminal velocity and coasts smoothly in an upward arc. We can unfasten our belts, now and take a look out of the portholes.

The ferry's programming has been accurate and after a few minutes, we find ourselves swinging into orbit within easy sight of the target space station. For a short time, we zoom along in its wake, behind and slightly below our quarry. The spectacle holds us glued to the tinted glass. Below, the swell of the earth slips by in a hazy, cloud flecked curve. Above, a blaze of unfiltered sunlight glints on the giant wheel as it slowly revolves against a background of star spangled black velvet. The sight is one that we will never forget.

In the ferry cabin, we feel a slight nudge of movement, and then another, as the pilot gently gooses his auxiliary rockets. Slowly, we overtake the whirling station, climbing foot by foot into its shadow. Then a delicate

touch of retro-rocket correlates our velocities and the two vehicles speed along their common orbital course in company. We are directly below the station, now and the final linking maneuver begins. Ever so slowly, our nose swings to the vertical until it is pointing up toward the trumpet-bell mouth of the landing dock. Inside the station, the Operations Officer throws a switch and a set of powerful electro-magnets are energized. Our ferry responds to their pull, its nose sliding smoothly upward into the bell. Higher it moves, accurately balanced and centered by magnetic force, until it is securely seated in the tubular dock. We are locked within the central spindle of the space station, the static axis about which the great wheel revolves. A moment later, the access hatch of our compartment swings open and we see the Operations Officer grinning in at us.

EXPLAINING that we are now in the motionless core of the station and therefore weightless, he guides us up through the hatchway. Eerily, we float out into the slowly turning hub chamber. Above us, an identical hatch leads to the upper spindle, with its astronomical labs and ball-mounted observatory. Around the cylindrical walls, four

other hatchways give access to the quadrupal spokes of the wheel. Following his directions, we glide feet first into one of them and find ourselves in a tiny elevator. Its door automatically closes and with a woosh of compressed air, the little lift descends. However, it is like no elevator we have ever ridden in on earth. As we progress downward, the usual falling away sensation is reversed and the floor presses increasingly against our feet. By the time we reach the "bottom" of the shaft, the effects of weightlessness have disappeared and we again experience the familiar pull of gravity. When a side door opens and we step out, we could just as well be in an air-conditioned office building on earth.

We are out in the rotating rim of the huge wheel, the area in which the station's crew live and work. Corridors lead off to either side and a staircase ascends to the deck above. As we stroll down one of these brightly lit hallways, we notice that each sector of the rim can be shut off from the others by airtight doors, and forms a separate, pressure proof entity. This, our guide points out, permits the isolation of any section accidentally pierced by cosmic debris. Opening off either side of the corridor is a succession of labs, storage and work-rooms, each equipped for a spe-

cific purpose or specialized research function. Those on the upper side are designed to use the intense light and heat of direct sunlight, the lower tier, the zero cold of spatial shadow. In the arches beneath the floor, are air-conditioning ducts and plumbing, plus tanks for the storage of water, chemicals, and bulk supplies.

Ascending to the deck above, we find the station's public rooms—lounge, library, music, TV and movie rooms. A bright, well appointed dining room adjoins the lounge, with kitchen and service pantry beyond. This level also contains living quarters for the station personnel. To permit precious privacy, there is a stateroom for each member of the staff and crew. The cabins on the shady side of the station have doors opening on a protected promenade that circles the satellite's rim. Through its plastic enclosure, superb views of the solar system unfold, with the sunlit earth appearing to revolve slowly around the stroller in a continuously changing panorama of cloud and landscape.

Above, on the sunny side of the giant wheel rim, are the hydroponic gardens, brightly green beneath their canopy of heat controlling plastic. Donning dark glasses, we are permitted a peep at several of the compart-

ments. Like the rest of the station, these are isolated from one another by pressure tight bulkheads. Each is completely self-contained and in case of damage by meteoric fragments, can be closed off and repaired without disturbing its neighbors. Carefully selected strains of algae are grown in nutrient solutions, circulating through a system of horizontal plastic tubes. These are the atmospheric heart of the station. Oxygen, given off by the plants as a regular process of growth, is gathered in the tops of the tubes and piped off for purification and recirculation. Carbon-dioxide, exhaled by the crew, is added to the nutrient solution and provides the plants with a necessity for growth. As the algae wax fat and mature, they sink to the bottom of the circulating solution and are drained off. This excess crop is then sun-dried and shipped back to earth as a by-product of the station's operation. Experiments have proven it to be equal to eggs and beefsteak in nutritive value.

Warned that the ferry ship is ready for the trip back to earth, we return to our cosmic taxi. We have had a glimpse of tomorrow—an inkling of what life will be like when man succeeds in completing his first real step into the illimitable universe that surrounds us.

THE END



DEAD WORLD

By JACK DOUGLAS

Illustrated by BARR

Out on the ice-buried planet, Commander Red Stone led his Free Companions to almost certain death. They died for a dangerous dream that had only one chance in a thousand trillion to come true. Is there a better reason for dying?

... although the most recent star to die, RNAC 89778 in the distant Menelaus galaxy (common name, Menelaus XII), had eight inhabited planets, only some one thousand people of the fifth planet escaped and survived as a result of a computer error which miscalculated the exact time by two years. Due to basic psycho-philo maladjustments the refugees of Menelaus XII-5 are classified as anti-social-types-B-6 and must be considered unstable. All anti-social-types-B-6 are barred from responsible positions in United Galaxies by order of the Inter-Galactic Council.

—Short History of The United Galaxies

YUAN ALTARIO started it. He was serving in my Company and he was one of them. A Menelaus XII-5 "unstable," and I don't ever call that damned little planet by its number if you meet one of them. They call it Nova-Maurania. But you won't meet one of them. Or maybe you will, maybe they did make it. I like to think they did.

There were a lot of them in the Companies in 3078. Restless men. The Companies were the logical place for them. We're still classified anti-social-B-6, too. Every year it's harder to get recruits, but we still have to be careful who we take in. We took Yuan Saltario. There was something

about him from the very start.

"Why do you want to join a Free Company?" He was a short, humanoid type with deep black eyes and a thin, lipless mouth that never smiled.

"I'm an anti-social. I like to fight. I want to fight."

"A misfit joining the misfits? A grudge against the Council? It's not good enough, mister, we live on the Council. Try again."

Saltario's black eyes stared without a flicker. "You're Red Stone, Commander of the Red Company. You hate the Council and I hate the Council. You're the . . ." Saltario stopped.

I said, "The traitor of the Glorious War of Survival. You can say it, Saltario."

The lipless mouth was rigid. "I don't think of it that way. I think of a man with personal integrity," Saltario said.

I suppose I should have seen it then, the rock he carried deep inside him. It might have saved thirty thousand good men. But I was thinking of myself. Commander Red Stone of the Red Company, Earthmen. Only we're not all Earthmen now, every year there are fewer recruits, and it won't be long before we die out and the Council will have the last laugh. Old Red Stone, the Traitor of the War of Survival, the little finger of my left hand still missing and telling the Universe I was a very old soldier of the out-

lawed Free Companies hanging onto life on a rocky planet of the distant Salaman galaxy. Back at the old stand because United Galaxies still need us. In a way it's a big joke. Two years after Rajay-Ben and I had a bellyfull of the Glorious War of Survival and they chased us all the way out here, they turned right around and made the peace. A joke on me, but sometimes I like to think that our runout was the thing that made them think and make peace. When you've been a soldier for thirty-five years you like to win battles, but you like to feel you helped bring peace, too.

I said, "Personal integrity. That sounds pretty good, doesn't it. So you like personal integrity? All right, Saltario, are you sure you know what you're getting into? We're 60 million light years from Galaxy Center, 10 million from the nearest United Galaxy city. We've got no comforts, no future, nothing to do but fight. A woman in her right mind won't look at us, if they see you in uniform they'll spit on you, if they catch you out of uniform they'll kill you."

Saltario shrugged. "I like to eat. I've got nowhere to go. All I've got is myself and a big piece of ice I called home."

I nodded. "Okay. We fight small wars for good profits. It's not Earth out here, but we've got

four nice sons, plenty of Lukanian whisky Rajay-Ben taught the locals to make, and we're our own masters. The United Galaxies leaves us pretty much alone unless they need us. You do your job, and your job is what I tell you to do, period. You got that straight?"

Saltario very nearly smiled. "It sounds good to me, sir."

"I hope it'll sound good in a year, Saltario, because once you're in you don't get out except feet first. Is that clear? I have life and death rights over you. You owe allegiance to the Red Company and me and to no one else. Got that? Today your best friends are the men of Rajay-Ben's Lukanian Fourth Free Patrol, and your worst enemies are the men of Mandasiva's Sirian O Company. Tomorrow Rajay-Ben's boys may be your worst enemies, and Mandasiva's troops your best friends. It all depends on the contract. A Company on the same contract is a friend, a Company against the contract is an enemy. You'll drink with a man today, and kill him tomorrow. Got it? If you kill a Free Companion without a contract you go to court-martial. If you kill a citizen of the United Galaxies except in a battle under contract I throw you to the wolves and that means you're finished. That's the way it is."

"Yes sir." Saltario never

moved a muscle. He was rigid.

"Right," I said, "get your gear, see the Adjutant and sign the agreement. I think you'll do."

Saltario left. I sat back in my chair and thought about how many non-Earthmen I was taking into the Company. Maybe I should have been thinking about this one single non-Earthman and the something he was carrying inside him, but I didn't, and it cost the Companies thirty thousand men we couldn't afford to lose. We can't afford to lose one man. There are only a hundred Companies now, twenty thousand men each, give or take a few thousand depending on how the last contract went. Life is good in the United Galaxies now that they've disarmed and outlawed all war again, and our breed is dying out faster than it did in the 500 years of peace before the War of Survival. Too many of the old Companions like me went west in the War of Survival. The Galactic Council know they need us, know that you can't change all living creatures into good Galactic citizens overnight, so they let us go on fighting for anyone in the Universe who wants to take something from someone else, or who thinks someone else wants to take something from him. And even the mighty United Galaxies needs guards for expeditions to the unexplored galaxies. But they don't

like us and they don't want us. They don't cut off our little fingers anymore, but we have to wear our special black uniforms when we go into United territory under penalty of a quick death. Humane, of course, they just put us to sleep gently and for keeps. And they've got a stockpile of ionic bombs ready at all times in case we get out of hand. We don't have ionic weapons, that's part of the agreement and they watch us. They came close to using them down there in the frozen waste of Menelaus XII, but thirty thousand of us died without ionics. We killed each other. They liked that, even if they didn't like what happened.

Do you know what it means to be lost? Really lost? I'm lost, if that means I know I'll never go back to live on Earth. But I know that Earth is still there to go back to, and I can dream of going home. Yuan Saltario and the other refugees have no home to go back to. They can't even dream. They sat in that one ship that escaped and watched their planet turn into a lifeless ball of ice that would circle dead and frozen forever around its burned-out star. A giant tomb that carried under its thick ice their homes and their fields and their loves. And they could not even hope and dream. Or I did not think they could.

Saltario had been with us a year when we got the contract to escort the survey mission to Nova-Maurania. A private Earth commercial mining firm looking for minerals under the frozen wastes of the dead planet. Rajay-Ben was in on the contract. We took two battalions, one from my Red Company, and one from Rajay-Ben's Lukanian Patrol. My Sub-Commander was Pete Colenso, old Mike Colenso's boy. It all went fine for a week or so, routine guard and patrol. The survey team wouldn't associate with us, of course, but we were used to that. We kept our eyes open and our mouths shut. That's our job, and we give value for money received. So we were alert and ready. But it wasn't the attack that nearly got us this time. It was the cold of the dead planet lost in absolute zero and absolute darkness.

Nova-Maurania was nearly 40 percent uranium, and who could resist that? A Centaurian trading unit did not resist the lure. The attack was quick and hard. A typical Lukanian Patrol attack. My Company was pinned down at the first volley from those damned smoky blasters of the Lukanians. All I could see was the same shimmering lights I had learned to know so well in the War of Survival against Lukanian. Someday maybe I'll find out how to see a Lukan, Rajay-

Ben has worked with me a long time to help, but when the attack came this time all I could do was eat ice and beam a help call to Rajay-Ben. That Centaurian trading unit was a cheap outfit, they had hired only one battalion of Arjay-Ben's Ninth Lukanian Free Patrol, and Rajay-Ben flanked them right off that planet. I got my boys on their feet and we chased Arjay's men half way back to Salaman with Rajay-Ben laughing like a hyena the whole way.

"Dip me in mud, Red boy, I'd give a prime contract for one gander at old Arjay-Ben's face. He's blowing a gasket!"

I said, "Nice flank job."

Rajay-Ben laughed so hard I could see his pattern of colored light shaking like a dancing rainbow. "I took two Sub-Commanders, wait'll I hit that bullet-head for ransom!"

Then we stopped laughing. We had won the battle, but Arjay-Ben was a crafty old soldier and his sabotage squad had wrecked our engines and our heating units. We were stuck on a frozen planet without heat.

Young Colenso turned white. "What do we do?"

I said, "Beam for help and pray we don't freeze first."

They had missed our small communications reactor unit. We sent out our call, and we all

huddled around the small reactor. There might be enough heat out of it to let us live five hours. If we were lucky. It was the third hour when Yuan Saltario began to talk. Maybe it was the nearness of death.

"I was twenty-two. Portario was the leader on our planet. He found the error when we had one ship ready. We had three days. No time to get the other ships ready. He said we were lucky, the other planets didn't have even one ship ready. Not even time for United Galaxies to help. Portario chose a thousand of us to go. I was one. At first I felt very good, you know? I was really happy. Until I found out that my wife couldn't go. Not fit enough. United Galaxies had beamed the standards to us. Funny how you don't think about other people until something hurts you. I'd been married a year. I told them it was both of us or neither of us. I told Portario to tell United Galaxies they couldn't break up a family and to hell with their standards. They laughed at me. Not Portario, the Council. What did they care, they would just take another man. My wife begged me to go. She cried so much I had to agree to go. I loved her too much to be able to stay and see the look on her face as we both died when she knew I could have gone. On the ship before we took off I stood at a port and looked

down at her. A small girl trying to smile at me. She waved once before they led her away from the rocket. All hell was shaking the planet already, had been for months, but all I saw was a small girl waving once, just once. She's still here, somewhere down there under the ice."

The cold was slowly creeping into us. It was hard to move my mouth, but I said, "She loved you, she wanted you to live."

"Without her, without my home, I'm as dead as the planet. I feel frozen. She's like that dead sun out there, and I'll circle around her until someone gets me and ends it." Saltario seemed to be seeing something. "I'm beginning to forget what she looked like. I don't want to forget! I can't forget her on this planet. The way it was! It was a beautiful place, perfect! I don't want to forget her!"

Colenso said, "You won't have long to remember."

But Colenso was wrong. My Third Battalion showed up when we had just less than an hour to live. They took us off. The Earth mining outfit haggled over the contract because the job had not been finished and I had to settle for two-third contract price. Rajay-Ben did better when he ransomed Arjay-Ben's two Sub-Commanders. It wasn't a bad deal and I would have been satis-

fied, except that something had happened to Yuan Saltario.

Maybe it made him realize that he did not want to die after all. Or maybe it turned him space-happy and he began to dream. A dream of his own born up there in the cold of his dead planet. A dream that nearly cost me my Company.

I did not know what that dream was until Saltario came into my office a year later. He had a job for the Company.

"How many men?" I asked.

"Our Company and Rajay-Ben's Patrol," Saltario said.

"Full strength?"

"Yes sir."

"Price?"

"Standard, sir," Saltario said. "The party will pay."

"Just a trip to your old planet?"

"That's all," Saltario said. "A guard contract. The hiring party just don't want any interference with their project."

"Two full Companies? Forty thousand men? They must expect to need a lot of protecting."

"United Galaxies opposes the project. Or they will if they get wind of it."

I said, "United opposes a lot of things, what's special about this scheme?"

Saltario hesitated, then looked at me with those flat black eyes. "Ionics."

It's not a word you say, or

hear, without a chill somewhere deep inside. Not even me and I know a man can survive ionic weapons. I know because I did once. Weapons so powerful I'm one of the last men alive who saw them in action. Mathematically the big ones could wipe out a Galaxy. I saw a small one destroy a star in ten seconds. I watched Saltario for a long time. It seemed a long time, anyway. It was probably twenty seconds. I was wondering if he had gone space-crazy for keeps. And I was thinking of how I could find out what it was all about in time to stop it.

I said, "A hundred Companies won't be enough. Saltario, have you ever seen or heard what an ionic bomb can . . ."

Saltario said, "Not weapons, peaceful power."

"Even that's out and you know it," I said. "United Galaxies won't even touch peaceful ionics, too dangerous to even use."

"You can take a look first."

"A good look," I said.

I alerted Rajay-Ben and we took two squads and a small ship and Saltario directed us to a tall mountain that jutted a hundred feet above the ice of Nova-Maurania. I was not surprised. In a way I think I knew from the moment Saltario walked into my office. Whatever it was Saltario was part of it. And I had a pretty good idea what it was. The only

question was how. But I didn't have time to think it out any farther. In the Companies you learn to feel danger.

The first fire caught four of my men. Then I was down on the ice. They were easy to see. Black uniforms with white wedges. Pete O'Hara's White Wedge Company, Earthmen. I don't like fighting other Earthmen, but a job's a job and you don't ask questions in the Companies. It looked like a full battalion against our two squads. On the smooth ice surface there was no cover except the jutting mountain top off to the right. And no light in the absolute darkness of a dead star. But we could see through our viewers, and so could they. They outnumbered us ten to one. Rajay-Ben's voice came through the closed circuit.

"Bad show, Red, they got our pants down!"

"You call it," I answered.

"Break silence!"

Surrender. When a Company breaks silence in a battle it means surrender. There was no other way. And I had a pretty good idea that the Council itself was behind O'Hara on this job. If it was ionics involved, they wouldn't ransom us. The Council had waited a long time to catch Red Stone in an execution offense. They wouldn't miss.

But forty of our men were down already.

"Okay," I beamed over the circuit, "break silence. We've had it Rajay."

"Council offense, Red."

"Yeah."

Well, I'd had a lot of good years. Maybe I'd been a soldier too long. I was thinking just like that when the sudden flank attack started. From the right. Heavy fire from the cover of the solitary mountain top. O'Hara's men were dropping. I stared through my viewer. On that mountain I counted the uniforms of twenty-two different Companies. That was very wrong. Whoever Saltario was fronting for could not have the power or the gold to hire twenty-four Companies including mine and Rajay-Ben's. And the fire was heavy but not that heavy. But whoever they were they were very welcome. We had a chance now. And I was making my plans when the tall old man stood up on the small, jutting top of that mountain. The tall old man stood up and a translating machine boomed out.

"All of you! O'Hara's men! Look at this!"

I saw it. In a beam of light on the top of that mountain it looked like a small neutron-source machine. But it wasn't. It was an ionic beam projector.

The old man said, "Go home."

They went. They went fast and silent. And I knew where they

were going. Not to Salaman. O'Hara would have taken one look at that machine and be half way to United Galaxy Center before he had stopped seeing it. I felt like taking that trip myself. But I had agreed to look and I would look. If we were lucky we would have forty-eight hours to look and run.

I fell in what was left of my Company behind the men that had saved us. More Company uniforms than I had ever seen in one place. They said nothing. Just walked into a hole in that mountain. Into a cave. And in the cave, at the far end, a door opened. An elevator. We followed the tall old man into the elevator and it began to descend. The elevator car went down for a long time. At last I could see a faint glow far below. The glow grew brighter and the car stopped. Far below the glow was still brighter. We all stepped out into a long corridor cut from solid rock. I estimated that we were at least two hundred miles down and the glow was hundreds of miles deeper. We went through three sealed doors and emerged into a vast room. A room bright with light and filled with more men in Company uniforms, civilians, even women. At least a thousand. And I saw it. The thousand refugees, all of them. Gathered from all the Companies, from wherever they had been in the Galaxies. Gath-

ered here in a room two hundred miles into the heart of their dead planet. A room filled with giant machines. Ionic machines. Highly advanced ionic power reactors.

The old man stood in front of his people and spoke. "I am Jason Portario, I thank you for coming."

I broke in, "Ionic power is an execution offense. You know that. How the hell did you get all this . . ."

"I know the offense, Commander," Portario said, "and I know you. You're a fair man. You're a brave man. It doesn't matter where we got the power, many men are dead to get it, but we have it, and we will keep it. We have a job to do."

I said, "After that stunt out there you've about as much chance as a snowball in hell. O'Hara's half way to Galaxy Center. Look, with a little luck we get you out to Salaman. If you leave all this equipment I might be able to hide you until it blows over."

The old man shrugged. "I would have preferred not to show our hand, but we had to save you. I was aware that the Council would find us out sooner or later, they missed the ionic material a month ago. But that is unimportant. The important matter is will you take our job? All we need is another two days, per-

haps three. Can you hold off an attack for that long?"

"Why?" I asked.

Portario smiled. "All right, Commander, you should know all we plan. Sit down, and let me finish before you speak."

I sat. Rajay-Ben sat. The agitation of his colored lights showed that he was as disturbed as I was. The thousand Nova-Mauranians stood there in the room and watched us. Yuan Saltario stood with his friends. I could feel his eyes on me. Hot eyes. As if something inside that lost man was burning again. Portario lighted a pipe. I had not seen a pipe since I was a child. The habit was classified as ancient usage in the United Galaxies. Portario saw me staring. He held his pipe and looked at it.

"In a way, Commander," the old man said, "this pipe is my story. On Nova-Maurania we liked a pipe. We liked a lot of the old habits. Maybe we should have died with all the others. You know, I was the one who found the error. Sometimes I'm not at all sure my friends here thank me for it. Our planet is dead, Commander, and so are we. We're dead inside. But we have a dream. We want to live again. And to live again our planet must live again." The old man paused as if trying to be sure of telling it right. "We mean no harm to anyone. All we want is our life back.

We don't want to live forever like lumps of ice circling around a dead heart. What we plan may kill us all, but we feel it is worth the risk. We have thousands of ionic power reactors. We have blasted out venturi tubes. We found life still deep in the center of this planet. It is all ready now. With all the power we have we will break the hold of our dead sun and send this planet off into space! We . . ."

I said, "You're insane! It can't . . ."

"But it can, Commander. It's a great risk, yes, but it can be done, my calculations are perfect! We want to leave this dead system, go off into space and find a new star that will bring life back to our planet! A green, live, warm Nova-Maurania once again!"

Rajay-Ben was laughing. "That's the craziest damned dream I ever sat still for. You know what your chances of being picked up by another star are? Picked up just right? Why . . ."

Portario said, "We have calculated the exact initial thrust, the exact tangential velocity, the precise orbital path we need. If all goes exactly, I emphasize, *exactly*, to the last detail as we have planned it we can do it! Our chances of being caught by the correct star in the absolutely correct position are one in a thou-

sand trillion, but we can do it!"

It was so impossible I began to believe he was right. "If you aren't caught just right?"

Portario's black eyes watched me. "We could burn up or stay frozen and lifeless. We could drift in space forever as cold and dead as we are now and our ionic power won't last forever. The forces we will use could blow the planet apart. But we are going to try. We would rather die than live as walking dead men in this perfect United Galaxies we do not want."

The silence in the room was like a Salaman fog. Thick silence broken only by the steady hum of the machines deep beneath us in the dead planet. A wild, impossible dream of one thousand lost souls. A dream that would destroy them, and they did not care. There was something about it all that I liked.

I said, "Why not get Council approval?"

Portario smiled. "Council has little liking for wild dreams, Commander. It would not be considered as advancing the future of United Galaxies' destiny. Then there are the ionics." And Portario hesitated. "And there is the danger of imbalance, Galactic imbalance. I have calculated carefully, the danger is remote, but Council is not going to take even a remote chance."

Yuan Saltario broke in. "All they care about is their damned sterile destiny! They don't care about people. Well we do! We care about something to live for. The hell with the destiny of the Galaxies! They don't know, and we'll be gone before they do know."

"They know plenty now. O'Hara's beamed them in."

"So we must hurry," Portario said. "Three days Commander, will you protect us for three days?"

A Council offense punishable by instant destruction with United Galaxies reserve ionic weapons in the hands of the super-secret police and disaster teams. And three days is a long time. I would be risking my whole Company. I heard Rajay-Ben laugh.

"Blast me, Red, it's so damned crazy I'm for it. Let's give it a shot."

I did not know then how much it would really cost us. If I had I might not have agreed. Or maybe I would have, it was good to know people could still have such dreams in our computer age.

"Okay," I said, "beam the full Companies and try to get one more. Mandasiva's Sirian boys would be good. We'll split the fee three ways."

Yuan Saltario said, "Thanks, Red."

I said, "Thank me later, if we're still around."

We beamed the Companies and in twenty minutes they were on their way. Straight into the biggest trouble we had had since the War of Survival. I expected trouble, but I didn't know how much. Pete Colenso tipped me off.

Pete spoke across the light years on our beam. "Mandasiva says okay if we guarantee the payment. I've deposited the bond with him and we're on our way. But Red, something's funny."

"What?"

"This place is empty. The whole damned galaxy out here is like a desert. Every Company has moved out somewhere."

"Okay," I beamed, "get rolling fast."

There was only one client who could hire all the Companies at one time. United Galaxies itself. We were in for it. I had expected perhaps ten Companies, not three against 97, give or take a few out on other jobs. It gave me a chill. Not the odds, but if Council was that worried maybe there was bad danger. But I'd given my word and a Companion keeps his word. We had one ace in the hole, a small one. If the other Companies were not here in Menelaus yet, they must have rendezvoused at Galaxy Center. It was the kind of "follow-the-book" mistake United would make. It gave us a day and a half. We would need it.

They came at dawn on the sec-

ond day. We were deployed across five of the dead planets of Menelaus XII in a ring around Nova-Maurania. They came fast and hard, and Portario and his men had at least ten hours work left before they could fire their reactors and pray. Until then we did the praying. It didn't help.

Mandasiva's command ship went at the third hour. A Lukan blaster got it. By the fourth hour I had watched three of my sub-command ships go. A Sirian force beam got one, an Earth fusion gun got another, and the third went out of action and rammed O'Hara's command ship that had been leading their attack against us. That third ship of mine was Pete Colenso's. Old Mike would have been proud of his boy. I was sick. Pete had been a good boy. So had O'Hara. Not a boy, O'Hara, but the next to the last of old Free Companion from Earth. I'm the last, and I said a silent good-bye to O'Hara. By the sixth hour Rajay-Ben had only ten ships left. I had twelve. Five thousand of my men were gone. Eight thousand of Rajay-Ben's Lukans. The Sirian's of Mandasiva's O Company were getting the worst of it, and in the eighth hour Mandasiva's second in command surrendered. It would be over soon, too soon. And the dream would be over with the battle. I broke silence.

"Red Stone calling. Do you

read me? Commander Stone calling. Request conference. Repeat, request conference."

A face appeared on the inter-Company beam screen. The cold, blank, hard-bitten face of the only Free Company Commander senior to me now that O'Hara was gone, Jake Compesino of the Cygne Black Company. "Are you surrendering, Stone?"

"No. I want to speak to my fellow Companions."

Compesino's voice was like ice. "Violation! You know the rules, Stone. Silence cannot be broken in battle. I will bring charges. You're through, Stone."

I said, "Okay, crucify me later. But hear me now."

Compesino said, "Close silence or surrender."

It was no good. We'd had it. And across the distance of battle Rajay-Ben's face appeared on the screen. The colored lights that were a Lukan's face and I knew enough to know that the shimmering lights were mad. "The hell with them, Red, let's go all the damned way!"

And a new face appeared on the screen. A face I knew too well. First Councillor Roark. "Stone! You've done a lot in your day but this is the end, you hear me? You're defending a madman in a Council crime. Do you realize the risk? Universal imbalance! The whole pattern of galaxies could be destroyed! We'll

destroy you for this, Stone. An ionic project without Council authorization."

I said to Campesino, "Five minutes, Commander. That's all."

There was a long blank on the screen, then Campesino's cold face appeared. "Okay, Red, talk. I don't like civilian threats. You've got your five minutes, make it good."

I made it good. I told them of a handful of people who had a dream. A handful of people who wanted their home back. A few lost souls who would rather die trying to live the way they wanted to live than go on living in a world they did not want. And I told them of the great United Galaxies, that had been created to protect the dreams of everyone in it and had forgotten why it had been created. I told them that it did not matter who was right or wrong, because when a man can no longer dream something has gone wrong in the Universe. When I finished, Cam-

pesino's face was impassive.

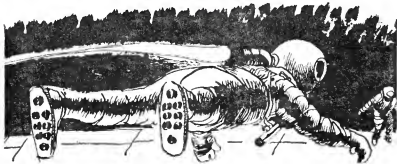
Campesino said, "You heard Commander Stone, men. Close off, Stone. give me a minute to get the vote."

I waited. It was the longest minute of my life.

"You win, Red," Campesino said. He was smiling at me. "Go home, Councillor, battle's over."

The Councillor went. He said there would be hell to pay, and maybe there will be, but I don't think so, they still need us. We lost thirty thousand good men in all the Companies. But when the next dawn came Nova-Maurania was gone. I don't know where they went, or what happened to them. Here in my stronghold I sometimes imagine them safe and rebuilding a green world where they can smoke pipes and live their own lives. And sometimes I imagine them all dead and drifting out there in the infinity of space. I don't think they would mind too much, either way.

THE END



Illustrated by SUMMERS



THE HAPPIEST MISSILE

BY RAYMOND E. BANKS



Have you wondered when anyone was going to get around to kidding the gantry off rockets and rocket-men? Well, here it is at last—the funniest story about missiles since Sputnik and Explorer said “Auf wiederseh’n” to each other.



POSSIBLY the most secret missile base in America is a tiny affair tucked away in a pocket of the California desert. It is so secret that some say the commanding officer signs his orders under an assumed name. Point Crystal is, of course, not the real name of the base. (California may or may not be the real name of the state.)

Therefore when the strange and wonderful flight of the **TERRIBLE TURK** took place, it was easy to conceal the events. To put it bluntly, there never has been or probably never will be again, a test flight such as we

participated in last May. My name is Conklin, electronics engineer, civilian. I was part of the Van West group that was assigned to check-out the electronics on the TURK missile.

Our troubles began when the various parts of the TURK, shipped in from widely scattered locations in the country, were finally assembled at Point Crystal, and Van West and I went there to manage the shoot.

"That is a missile?" said Van West, when we examined the TURK shortly after our arrival. The Commanding Officer, (I won't mention the service, and you can't find out, because Point Crystal has been put under the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, for purposes of secrecy,) John Hearn, said testily, "Professor Van West, you must understand that we assembled this missile with varying crews at different times of day. At no time were any of the men allowed to see what the others had done. Ours are the first human eyes that have seen the missile in its entirety."

We walked up slowly, and in the case of Van West, a serious expert, with what I thought was a good deal of awe, on the TURK. It was shaped like an English Oxford. Van West kicked the side of it and listened to the reverberating boom inside. It was his practice to kick missiles

to feel of the quality. As a real expert he could tell pretty much how it would go, just as a housewife taps her watermelon in the supermarket.

"Hmmm," said Van West.

"That's a polished surface," said Hearn in shocked protest. "The slightest dent in it will cause a high degree of error in flight."

It sounded like Hearn had been reading service manuals, or perhaps even textbooks, and Van West winked at me. "I'll be careful," he promised Hearn, scratching a kitchen match on the missile's side and lighting his cigar. It left an ugly yellow slash on the polished side.

Hearn had blanched white and plucked at his sleeve. "The fuel—the fuel," he gasped. "It's so volatile that it will explode on contact with a match flame at two hundred yards."

"Hmmm," said Van West. He flipped open the fuel intake cap and peered inside. He dipped a finger in the tank and tasted the fuel. He scratched another match and held it in front of the tank. It lit up a pretty blue, while Hearn crawled all over me trying to get out of range.

"A new fuel with plenty of alcohol in it, Conklin," said Van West significantly.

"Just like cherries jubilee," I had to agree.

"The manual promised an explosion," said Hearn weakly.

"Well now, Commander," said Van West, "Your contractors will exaggerate a little, to impress the government."

He blew out the flame and turned the handle of the hatch to the interior. The handle came off in his hand.

This was while Hearn read to us about the high precision, tested quality from a book, which, for the purposes of secrecy, was in a cover of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, entitled, "Colic in Babies—A Treatise for Young Mothers".

"The handle works quite easily," said Van West, handing it to Hearn. "But how do we get in it?"

Hearn colored and muttered something about inspections, but I assured him that the missile inspectors for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare probably weren't *quite* so highly trained as those in the Defense Department.

Van West kicked the missile so hard he left a heel print. The door popped open, and we went in.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," said Hearn. "Several million dollars, and two years of the lives of myself and my men have been devoted to the supervision, assembly and coming flight-test of this missile. This is the only one,

and if it fails, our work will have all been in vain."

Van West spoke from the inside. "I like this missile," he said. "It is a sophisticated missile, and I like the sophisticated feel of it."

"Are you supposed to like a missile?" asked Hearn testily, stepping inside. He took off his service cap reverently.

"This cabin is quite comfy," said Van West, and Hearn glared dark blood at him.

"This cabin," said Hearn, "was scientifically designed to house three of the highest trained, most alert, most carefully selected men in the service. They are due to arrive this afternoon. All I have to know from you is if the electronics work—and how soon can we fire?"

"Hmmm," said Van West. He eased open a control panel—he was surgeon-loving about electronics gear if not the missile hulks that carried them. Inside was a maze of wires. Several of them were taped off in evident exasperation, and an unknown technician had pencilled in a draftsman's hand "Nuts!"

Van West scratched his chin with the wasted wires. "Pretty fair, for wiring," he said. "Average-good I'd say. Conklin, what does the reading say on that plate."

"WARNING," I read, "THIS INERTIAL NAVIGATION EQUIPMENT

IS SO SENSITIVE THAT A SNAP OF THE FINGER WILL SPOIL ITS ACCURACY."

Van West closed the panel, turned on the dials. No lights lit. No dial needles lifted. He banged the panel with his closed fist until our ears were stunned. The lights lit, the needles got busy.

"My God!" cried Hearn.

"Don't worry," said Van West. "They build in a safety factor for idiots like me."

"How soon can we fire?" asked Hearn, wiping his forehead.

"I'd say as soon as you reassemble the first and third stages which occupy second and fourth places," said Van West, his mild blue eyes on Hearn. "In its present assembly, the TURK will go one hundred and fifty miles up, and two hundred down immediately thereafter. This is simply not good missile arithmetic."

Hearn nodded dumbly. "We had the men work with their hands under tarps," he apologized. "Secrecy you know."

"Naturally," said Van West, flushing the little toilet off the cabin. "My God, the plumbing is first rate. But really good!"

A lieutenant stuck his head into the missile, eyes blindfolded of course. "Sir, the ladies are here."

"What ladies!" cried Hearn.

"The missile crew from the De-

partment of Health, Education and Welfare. The highly-trained, prime crew for the TURK."

"Are you sure!" cried Hearn.

"Sir, I haven't seen them, according to your orders," he lightly touched his blindfold, "but they have ladies' voices and one of them asked for the powder room, so I think they're ladies all right."

"Steady," I told Hearn. "It could've been mice or monkeys."

Did I mention that Commander Hearn had a mustache? It bristled a half hour later as the three ladies from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare gingerly climbed into the missile and sat down tentatively on the reclining pads provided for the crew. Naturally, due to the extreme gravity of missile travel, they would have to take off lying flat on their backs.

There was no doubt that Health, Education and Welfare was right on the nose. Miss Larson was from Health, a big-boned, lanky Swedish massage type of woman, who looked as if she had just finished or was about to start gnawing a carrot. She patted the reclining pad with her baseball player's fingers.

"Too soft," she said. "Spine not well-supported."

"It's different with gravity," said Van West mildly. "Gravity

will make that foam rubber feel like a cement sidewalk."

Miss Larson smiled, showing horse-sized gold teeth. "I think I like this gravity, much," she said.

Miss Stone, the second lady, reminded me of the only social worker I ever knew. She was thin, wore glasses, had large human eyes, and a sympathetic mama-like bun of hair. It was easy to see that everybody's welfare was hers. "Shan't we take some food for—er—the natives?" she asked.

"We wouldn't want to bring them our germs," smiled Van West kindly.

She nodded. "I have brought some albums of folk-songs," she said. "Some nineteenth century Indian war chants, and some minuets. I thought—er—the natives might want to know something of our culture."

That was when Commander Hearn really began to bristle.

"Ladies," he said. "I must recheck your orders. Most missile crews—"

"Oh, but there is no mistake," said Miss Castle, the last and best looking of the three. She had identified herself as a teacher. That may be, but they didn't have anything like that teaching the sixth grade when I went to school. Her eyes were a rich blue, her smile a succession of delightful dimples, her figure the kind men have always appreciated.

"No mistake," she said. "We know all about breathing oxygen, and how to act in blackout, and feeding ourselves under gravity-free conditions. The marines taught us."

"You three—at a marine training camp?" I asked.

"An isolated marine training camp," said the lovely, eyes rich with laughter.

"Yah, the food was good," grinned Miss Larson. "By golly, they had a sergeant could out hand-wrestle me."

"Did the marines—offer to compete with you, Miss Castle?" asked Van West.

Miss Castle tossed her silk-gleaming curls. "They did," she said. She shook loose a six-inch long instrument that looked like a Florentine stiletto, a hatpin, and smiled.

That's when Hearn reached the top of his bristle. "Ladies, while in my command—a military manner—"

But Van West wayed a hand. "We'll get rid of something to accommodate it, Ma'am." He looked around, found a compass and jerked it loose from its moorings. He tossed it to me. "Silly thing to have in space. So who cares North?"

Hearn closed his eyes but controlled his voice. "How soon—dear Lord—I mean Mr. Van West—can we fire?"

Van West licked his forefinger

and stuck it out of the porthole feeling the wind. "Anytime, starting in about six hours, if you can get those firing steps changed."

"Shouldn't you check with our meteorological service?" asked Hearn. "It's the finest on—in near, at any event the finest wherever we are. It has almost a million dollars in weather-predicting equipment, including a computer a block long. It—"

But Van West wet his finger and stuck it out again.

"Six hours," he said shortly, clumping down off the missile. "Come on, Conklin. Time to start the countdown."

Going out we bumped into Lt. Spicer, still blindfolded, carrying the ladies' luggage.

Hearn moved off with Van West, pale but gritting his teeth. I stayed to watch the tall young lieutenant, blindfolded, deliver his luggage. His problem was that Miss Stone, the welfare girl with glasses, sounded like Marilyn Monroe. He tried to hand her the luggage, feel her hand, feel her arm, but she evaded him. Miss Castle, the beauty, looked at him speculatively, I thought—automatically lifting her hatpin, then seeing he was blindfolded, then seeing his preoccupation with trying to home on the source of the honey-sweet voice of the dried-up, but nice

Miss Stone. I thought she made her voice sound much coarser when she got her luggage. He practically tossed it to her and tried to follow the blushing Miss Stone around the small cabin. But he got stuck on Miss Larson, who let out an athletic yelp.

I couldn't see the male of the species degenerated any more. "There's a helluva bugle call going on over there," I called to the poor, blindfolded lieutenant. "Mean something?"

He sighed. "Supper. Please give me a hand, Mr. Conklin."

We walked towards the barracks. "This Miss Larson—rather plump for a missile maverick, huh?" he said as we walked blindfolded.

"Rather," I said noncommittally.

"But—uh—Miss Stone—she sounds nice."

"A warm person," I said. Now that the ladies were out of hearing, making themselves at home, or whatever female astronauts do, I felt a perverse streak coming up in myself.

"Warm person—usually nice nice and—uh—nice figure," he said.

I grunted.

"This Miss Stone," he said, when I didn't amplify. "I—I'm just guessing. I'd say she had blue eyes from the sound of her voice. Lovely blue eyes!"

"I didn't notice."

"She—ah—sounds young and you know, alive, fun to be with, like on the beach with a nice figure in a cute bathing suit," he said.

"What do you think of Miss Castle?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I haven't had a date in six months. Now this Miss Stone. . . ."

I was too mean to enlighten him, and too sympathetic to lie.

"Son, in a space-suit they all look alike," I told him.

I sat facing the peaked edge of Lt. Spicer's blindfold as we ate. He was really quite good at eating blindfolded after six months. Hearn ate stolidly. Van West ate with zest. From time to time Harry, our crew chief, came in and cried, "Aitch plus five hours!" Then he'd go away.

"Shouldn't you be in the blockhouse?" asked Hearn of Van West.

"I never go into concrete blockhouses until the last minute," said Van West. "Asthma. Concrete dust gets me. My man, Harry, will keep me in touch with the count."

"It'll be a great moment when the TERRIBLE TURK lifts," said Hearn unconvinced. "I've invited some of my friends to come over. Uh—do you think we might shoot a little early—get the missile women out of si—into the missile a little early? The mixed

up stages have been adjusted."

"Six hours," said Van West.

Lt. Spicer's head looked like a miniature snow-plow as he turned his face to converse with another blindfolded lieutenant. "She has hips like a grown-up golf ball," he said. "I can tell it from this Miss Stone's voice."

The other lieutenant pointed his miniature snow-plow head at Spicer. "You're too late, buddy, old buddy. While they were getting checked-out for security. I dated that Miss Stone. It seems she's never ridden in a jet airplane."

Spicer's blindfold trembled. "Oh, you rat!"

"Looks like you're stuck with Miss Castle," I told Spicer.

"This stew tastes like old rubber-bands!" cried Spicer in agony.

"Here, here," said the Commander. "We've been getting the finest food that the services can provide." He allowed his mess steward to pour him a vast glass of something very spicy. "The finest!" he said in horror, drinking, looking out of the window at the TERRIBLE TURK and shuddering. I turned my face in case he broke into tears.

It was H-hour minus sixty-eight minutes.

"!-minus eighty-six," Harry said, coming into the commander's comfortable office where we

were gathered. He had his numbers mixed again. Sixty-eight and eighty-six always gave him trouble, but Van West and I automatically allowed for it.

Not so Commander Hearn, General Jackson, and Provost Steel, his friends from a neighboring military base that had come to see the shoot. They bustled around the office, changing all the clocks and Hearn got on the phone to bawl out his base electrician.

One large window looked out on the TERRIBLE TURK, pointing its neat oxford nose low in the sky.

"Someone is nailing boards over our window!" cried General Jackson, having left off clock-winding to pick up his binoculars.

"Ah—yes," said Commander Hearn, "I don't—uh—want any glass shattered. My glass bill is fantastic—something you non-missile boys don't have to worry about."

"But we won't see the shoot!" cried Provost Steel, tossing off a glass of Hearn's liquor.

Hearn poured himself from the same container. "Ah, well," said Hearn. "They're all alike—a big bang, and a lot of dust."

"Like to meet your crew, Eddie," said Jackson. "Must be sharp, brave lads."

"They—uh—too busy," said Hearn.

At that moment the door burst open and an apparition came in. It was actually only Miss Stone wearing all of her space-suit but the fishbowl. The webbed space-suit looked like she was sitting down on her thin figure.

"Commander, I must have a needle for my record-player," she said.

Before he could answer Lt. Spicer burst into the room. "I have a needle, Miss Stone!" he cried joyously. "I found a needle for you!"

The other door opened at the same time to reveal a blindfolded Lt. Wiggins. "Here's the needle you wanted for the space flight, Miss Stone!" he cried. "Guaranteed to last a thousand spins!"

Miss Stone took refuge behind Van West who was patiently trying to get on with his reading of LOLITA. "A hand fell on me while I was trying out the reclining pad!" she whispered hastily.

"Gentlemen!" roared Hearn.

The lieutenants stiffened, saluted and vanished very rapidly considering their blindfolds. Miss Stone went too. "I feel so darn silly in this space suit," she said. "I hope I don't scare those natives."

She vanished.

Provost Steel dropped his mouth open. General Jackson stared first at the door, then at

the liquor, shook his head and stared at the door again.

"Looked like a woman, by God!" he said.

"Couldn't have been a woman," said Steel. "Not for missile crew. Probably a young recruit."

"Crew," said Van West.

"Crew?" said Jackson.

"Creewww!" whistled Provost Steel.

"Crew," groaned Hearn.

His two old friends stared at him with gathering disbelief and shaken confidence.

"There has to be a first woman *sometime!*" cried Hearn in agony, drawing himself up straight, twenty years of service to his country behind him. It was his first missile shoot and he had bragged for months.

His two old cronies stared in silence. Then General Jackson stepped to the window. "Resume boarding up the windows!" the General ordered. He filled his glass and lifted it. "Anyway, here's to Korea!"

"Bulge," said Provost hoisting his glass.

The words came as fondly as a lost dream to Hearn's lips. "Vella-LaVella, Kwajalein—Guadalcanal!" he said lifting his glass.

They drank.

I tapped Van West's knee. "It seems a bit thick, Van," I said. "After all those poor girls—they're really going to be hurled

in space. And the missile does seem skimpy. I'm surprised."

Van West gave me a conspiratorial look. "This late I can tell you the truth, Conklin. It's an anti-success missile."

"Anti-success missile?"

"It isn't supposed to leave the ground. Rises gently six feet, bumps back. Defense is tired of all the outrageous publicity we give to our shoots. Since one more miss won't hurt much, they've used this project to draw off the attention of the press and the snoopers who want to make America seem inadequate. Planned two years ago. Perfectly kept secret. Tonight, in Florida, they're rasing a real donkey to kick the sky!"

He winked at me and drank a sip of Hearn's dew. "So don't worry about the ladies."

"Poor Hearn," I said. "His first missile."

Van West laid aside his book. "*However,*" he said, "the TERRIBLE TURK will *not* fail. In fact, it will fail as an anti-success missile, because it is going to succeed!"

I stared at him stupefied. "It will fire?"

"Yes, my dear boy. Make one of the finest shots in missile history. Everybody was relaxed when it was drawn up. Since it wasn't going anywhere at all, nobody drove somebody else crazy checking up on them. They let

the designers design. They let the metallurgists try a new re-entry alloy. They let the fuelmen pull some new wrinkles. The TERRIBLE TURK is as relaxed as an old shoe—but it'll shoot clean and true, it'll tear a corner off the moon, bounce in the dust off Mars and knock a hole the size of the house in the sun!"

Van West was never wrong about missiles.

"The ladies!" I cried.

Van West waved at the window. "You'll notice I've set it on as low trajectory as possible. The orbit will be very flat, I hope. However, it needs about four-hundred more pounds to keep it down."

"How can you get that much weight into it now?" I asked. "It's all trimmed and tight. By now even Miss Stone must be getting strapped into her bunk by the blindfolded—Lieutenants Spicer—and—Wiggins—"

"Exactly," said Van West. "Four hundred pounds of clean, young blindfolded American manhood. Harry is supposed to get them out. But he'll maroon them in the aft compartment that started out to be a motor and got abandoned. Plenty comfortable in there—with a wall between the sexes, so to speak, during its flight. Washington will be pleased."

"But Van—those poor guys, under gravity!"

"A while ago I dragged some old sleeping bags in there. With inflated air mattresses. Same thing as the ladies have, but cost eleven dollars and sixty-eight cents instead of five thousand for the regular gravity pads. As soon as they see they're trapped, they'll have the sense to use them."

"Food and water—"

"There is a small hole between the girls and the men's compartments," said Van West. "The girls may pass food to the men—if the men sweet-talk them enough."

"Van," I said, "Van."

"The Russians," said Van West "are going to have a hard time understanding this one."

"Aitch minus ten," said Harry, coming into the Commander's private men's room, where Van and I watched the TERRIBLE TURK through a small window. A mushroom of fire beat out around its tail. It was taking off.

"Thanks, Harry," said Van, and Harry left still thinking he had ten minutes to go.

Out in the main office with the boarded up window, Hearn, Jackson and Steel softly sang, "Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder—" It was dramatic.

Now we saw the TERRIBLE TURK shake herself and peer uncertainly at the horizon, like a young canary about to take first

flight from her nest. The TURK rose tentatively in space, trembled, liked the feel of flight and jumped towards the hills like a giant's foot skimming over the earth. It was clean and beautiful to see. I understood at once that it would reach the sun and keep on going, if it wanted.

"Yoicks!" cried Van West. "Yoicks, damn you, yoicks!" He practically danced all over the commander's bathtub, shouting "Yoicks!" eyes blazing, mouth wide in appreciation. He did love to see a clean go-off.

It was silent in the desert.

"I didn't like your count-down," I told him. "It was careless—and cruel to those young people."

Van West rose slowly from the bathtub. "Conklin," he said, "That wonderful TURK never needed a countdown. It's just a comfortable piece of the world's finest metal, powered by the world's most potent fuel, carrying a couple of the world's best radios. All it needed was a match to touch it off—zooooom!"

"But all those poor guys slaving in the block house!"

"Look," said Van, "suppose I told them they weren't needed. On a fine, clean shoot like this. One to be proud of. No, Conklin, it's got to be *their* victory, too!"

Harry appeared at the door. "Aitch minus five," he said. "She goes in five minutes."

"Thank you, Harry," said Van as I helped him from the tub.

We tiptoed past Hearn and his friends. Hearn had his finger pointed at Jackson. "Billy-Bally!" he said. "Your men *did* call you Billy-Bally!"

We stopped at the radio central.

"JPL's Goldstone reporting first tracking report on the TURK, sir," said the grim-faced lad.

"What do they get from the TURK?" asked Van West.

The man turned up the volume. We heard the loud, unmistakable sounds of a minuet tinkling out. It was for stringed quartet.

"Very pretty, very sweet," muttered Van West.

"Goldstone is puzzled sir," said the operator.

"Here comes the TURK pass over Europe!" cried the next operator.

"Read us, read us!" cried Van West.

This time we heard the clear sounds of a human voice. "And a one—two—three—four—hands to hips—down—up—get out—those crinkles—three—four—down—up—three four—" came the tones of Miss Larson.

"Gravity does leave you with heavy muscles," nodded Van West.

"This is incredible!" cried the operator.

"Imagine the listening Russians," said Van West.

We sat and waited. The party was over in Hearn's office. He was bent tightly to his direct "hot" phone to Washington, with Steel and Jackson bent over his shoulder like three racetrack touts hearing the race returns.

"But, sir, but sir—" Hearn was spluttering. "I didn't *know* it was supposed to fail!"

An orderly dashed down the radio panel board line. "Our own tracking station has TURK on her first loop of the world!" cried the orderly.

Commander Hearn shushed Washington for a moment. "What signal do you get!" he cried.

The orderly gulped. "A—a woman's scream, sir. Also, a man's hoarse yell—something about a—excuse me, sir—damned hatpin!"

Hearn sighed and put the receiver back to his ear. "Go ahead, Washington," he said. "We didn't get anything significant on her first pass over us."

"Do you suppose the men broke through to the women's compartment?" I asked Van West.

But Van was in action already. He gripped the microphone in his hands. His grip was so tight, his hands were white.

"TURK. TURK! Listen to me. This is Van West. Listen! You

must repel those young men, ladies. America cannot stand to have a scandal of this sort. You *must* keep your wall intact. Try the pine-scented aerosol bomb near the forward hatch. Squirt it through their hole! What—it's no use—they're almost through the wall? TURK—listen—this is an emergency—cut off their oxygen. Do you recognize the oxygen container. No—turn it OFF. Read the words—OFF!"

He sighed and set the microphone down. "They're out four hundred miles already. Those poor girls at the mercy of these long undated young men—"

He swung on Hearn. "You idiot!" Van West roared. "How dare you undate those young men for six months. I'll have you broken to a prisoner-of-war for this!"

Hearn, catching it from Washington, now from Van West looked goggle-eyed. "I—it—secrecy—" he babbled.

Van West went over and grabbed Hearn bodily. He took the Washington "hot" line. "Goodbye" he told the phone and hung up. The phone immediately began to ring incessantly. Van West lugged Hearn to the microphone. He thrust it in the Commander's hand. "On the next pass, you will order those young men to stand at attention until further notice," he cried. "Until we can get my wonderful TURK

down! I will not have a rape on my missile."

"Yes, sir," said Hearn weakly, wetting his lips.

Van West swept up the angrily ringing Washington phone. "This is Van West," he said. "We have a crisis out here! Shut up the phone ringing, or I may go back to Germany. . . . No, by God," he cried, "I'll go to *Cuba!*"

He hung up the phone. It did not ring again.

"Here comes the TURK!" cried the operator.

"So soon," muttered Van. He looked dejected now. As if suddenly, it had all passed out of his hands. "You—" he said to Hearn. "You do not grasp—"

That was *my* moment of glory—to contribute something to the great TURK victory. I leaped to the microphone and snatched up from Hearn.

"Turn on your loudspeaker," I ordered the TURK. "You, Miss Larson. The thing that looks like a diathermy machine."

"Yah, I did," came back her faint voice a thousand miles up.

"Spicer!" I yelled. "Wiggins! She looks like Alice the Goon! They ALL look like Alice the Goon! Except Miss Castle. She has a hatpin!"

The TURK was past us again.

"The TURK is silent," said Kansas City.

"Silent," said Florida.

"The non-existent American missile, proved its non-existence on its third pass over Russia by not sending any signals," report Russia.

They all slapped my back.

"But how will those poor, brave kids get down?" cried General Jackson.

"They'll land at Los Angeles International Airport tomorrow at nine-twenty," said Van West, allowing himself a pip of Hearn's dew. "Between Flight 201, TWA, and American 606 from Kansas City."

"How do you know?" asked Provost Steel.

"When I plan a trajectory," said Van West, "I know."

"My missile is a success?" asked Hearn trembling.

"A big success," said Van West.

"How big?"

"Remember Patton?" he said. "MacArthur? Eisenhower?"

Hearn nodded mutely.

"You'll walk on their heads in the history books," said Van West. "Boy, you'll walk right down the sky!"

That's it, I guess. The happiest missile Van West and I ever shot. Except to report that recently Lt. Spicer sent me a hatpin, which suggests several interesting possibilities.

THE END

The Undersea

BY L. TAYLOR HANSEN

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

WOMEN have always been scarce in the rollcall of science fiction writers. In SF's early days they were a real novelty. One of the most promising women science fiction writers successfully concealed her sex until nearly 10 years after the appearance of her first story, *What the Sodium Lines Revealed*, published in *AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY* f. Winter, 1929. That story attracted favorable attention but—or perhaps because—no one dreamed that the first initial in the author's name, *L. Taylor Hansen*, stood for "Louise."

Her most famous story was *Prince of Liars*, a novelette in *AMAZING STORIES* for October, 1930, one of the most remarkable interplanetary tales ever written. However, her most literary effort was a short story titled *The Undersea Tube*. It is a masterpiece of technique in the finest tradition of H. G. Wells. The building of a tunnel beneath the Atlantic to be used by vehicles powered by compressed air is told in so matter-of-fact and scientific a manner that the reader completely accepts its reality, and the tube

becomes part of the story background. Into this pragmatic, well-ordered world is thrown one element that contrasts so vividly with the believable background as to haunt the reader with its unresolved mystery.

Provocative as the mystery of *The Undersea Tube* was, it's author was to present the world of science fiction with an even stranger one. Her only public appearance was at a meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society in 1939, at the invitation of Forrest J. Ackerman, perennial mentor of the Association. After being feted for the excellence of her contributions to science fiction, and creating considerable surprise over the fact that *L. Taylor Hansen* was a woman, she excused herself to make a telephone call. Emerging from the booth she approached Ackerman and said: "I must leave now but there is something important I have to tell you. I never wrote those stories. They were written by my brother who is a world traveler, who wrote them for fun and sent them to me to publish under my own name. I

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Tube



just wanted you to know." She left the cafeteria where the club meetings were held and never appeared at a public science fiction gathering again.

A series of 59 articles displaying an amazing range of erudition and background in exploration appeared in AMAZING STORIES under the name of L. Taylor Hansen from 1941 to 1948. Was this Louise or her explorer brother? No light has ever been shed on this unusual mystery.

IF my friend the engineer had not told me the Tube was dangerous, I would not have bought a ticket on that fatal night, and the world would never have learned the story of the Golden Cavern and the City of the Dead. Having therefore, according to

universal custom, first made my report as the sole survivor of the much-discussed Undersea Tube disaster to the International Committee for the Investigation of Disasters, I am now ready to outline that story for the world. Naturally I am aware of the many wild tales and rumors that have been circulated ever since the accident, but I must ask my readers to bear with me while I attempt to briefly sketch, not only the tremendous difficulties to be overcome by the engineers, but also the wind-propulsion theory which was made use of in this undertaking; because it is only by understanding something of these two phases of the Tube's engineering problems that one can understand the accident and its subsequent revelations.

It will be recalled by those who have not allowed their view of modern history to become too hazy, that the close of the twentieth century saw a dream of the engineering world at last realized—the completion of the long-heralded undersea railroad. It will also be recalled that the engineers in charge of this stupendous undertaking were greatly encouraged by the signal success of the first tube under the English Channel, joining England and France by rail. However, it was from the second tube across the Channel and the tube connecting Montreal to New

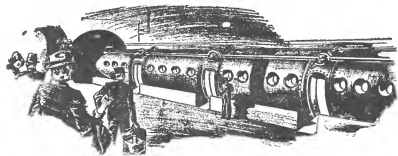
York, as well as the one connecting New York and Chicago, that they obtained some of their then radical ideas concerning the use of wind power for propulsion. Therefore, before the Undersea Tube had been completed, the engineers in charge had decided to make use of the new method in the world's longest tunnel, and upon that decision work was immediately commenced upon the blue-prints for the great air pumps that were to rise at the two ends—Liverpool and New York. However, I will touch upon the theory of wind-propulsion later and after the manner in which it was explained to me.

It will be recalled that after great ceremonies, the Tube was begun simultaneously at the two terminating cities and proceeded through solid rock—low enough below the ocean floor to overcome the terrible pressure of the body of water over it, and yet close enough to the sea to overcome the intensity of subterranean heat. Needless to say, it was an extremely hazardous undertaking, despite the very careful surveys that had been made, for the little parties of workmen could never tell when they would strike a crack or an unexpected crevice that would let down upon them with a terrible rush, the waters of the Atlantic. But hazard is adventure, and as the two little groups of laborers dug toward

each other, the eyes of the press followed them with more persistent interest than it has ever followed the daily toil of any man or group of men, either before or since.

ONCE the world was startled by the "extree-ee—" announcing that the English group had broken into an extinct volcano, whose upper end had apparently been sealed ages before, for it contained not water but air—

thousand diamonds. But when they found the jeweled casket, through whose glass top they peered curiously down upon the white body of a beautiful woman, partly draped in the ripples of her heavy, red hair, the world gasped and wondered. As every school child knows, the casket was opened by curious scientists, who flocked into the tube from the length of the world, but at the first exposure to the air, the strange liquid that had protected



curiously close and choking perhaps, but at least it was not the watery deluge of death. And then came the great discovery. No one who lived through that time will forget the thrill that quickened the pulse of mankind when the American group digging through a seam of old lava under what scientists call the "ancient ridge," broke into a sealed cavern which gleamed in the probing flashlights of the workers like the scintillating points of a

the body vanished, leaving in the casket not the white figure, but only a crumbling mass of grey dust. But the questions that the finding of the cave had raised remained unanswered.

Who was this woman? How did she get into the sealed cavern? If she had been the court favorite of that mythical kingdom, now sunk beneath the waves, and had been disposed of in court intrigue, why would her murderers have buried her

in such a casket? How had she been killed? An unknown poison? Perhaps she had been a favorite slave of the monarch. This view gained many converts among the archaeologists who argued that from all the evidence we have available, the race carrying the Iberian or Proto-Egyptian culture, long thought to have been the true refugees from sinking Atlantis, were a slight dark-haired race. Therefore this woman must have been a captive. Geologists, analyzing the lava, announced that it had hardened in air and not in water, while anthropologists classed the skull of the woman as essentially more modern than either the Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon types. But the engineers, secretly fuming at the delay, finally managed to fill up the cave and press on with their drills.

Then following the arguments that still flourished in the press, came a tiny little news article and the first message to carry concern to the hearts of the engineers. The sea had begun to trickle in through one slight crack. Perhaps it was only because the crevice was located on the English side of the now famous "ancient ridge" that the article brought forth any notice at all. But for the engineers it meant the first warning of possibly ultimate disaster. They

could not seal the crack, and pumps were brought into play. However, as a month wore on, the crack did not appear to widen to any material extent and the danger cry of a few pessimists was forgotten.

Finally, it will be remembered, that sounders listening in the rocks heard the drillers of the other party, and then with wild enthusiasm the work was pushed on to completion. The long Tube had been dug. Now it only remained for the sides at the junction to be enlarged and encased with cast iron, while the work of setting up the great machines designed to drive the pellet trains through, was also pushed on to its ultimate end. Man had essayed the greatest feat of engineering ever undertaken in the history of the planet, and had won. A period of wild celebration greeted the first human beings to cross each direction below the sea.

Did the volume of water increase that was carried daily out of the Tube and dumped from the two stations? If it did, the incident was ignored by the press. Instead, the fact that some "cranks" persisted in calling man's latest toy unsafe, only attracted more travel. The Undersea Tube functioned on regular schedule for three years, became the usual method of ocean transit.

THIS was the state of matters, when on the fourth of March last, our textile company ordered me to France to straighten out some orders with the France house, the situation being such that they preferred to send a man. Why they did not use radio-vision I do not care to state, as this is my company's business.

Therefore, upon entering my apartment, I was in the midst of packing when the television phone called me. The jovial features of "Dutch" Higgins, my one-time college room-mate and now one of the much-maligned engineers of the Undersea Tube, smiled back at me from the disk.

"Where are you? I thought we had a sort of dinner engagement at my apartment, Bob."

"By gollies I forgot, Dutch. I'll be right over—before it gets cold."

Then immediately I turned the knob to the Municipal Aerial-car yards, and ordered my motor, as I grabbed my hat and hurried to the roof. In due time, of course, I sprang the big surprise of the evening, adding:

"And, of course, I'm going by the Tube, I feel sort of a half-partnership in it because you were one of the designers."

A curious half-pained look crossed his face. We had finished our meal, and were smoking with pushed-back chairs. He finished filling his pipe, and scowled.

"Well? Why don't you say something? Thought you'd be—well sort of pleased."

He struck his automatic lighter and drew in a long puff of smoke before answering.

"Wish you'd take another route, Bob."

"Take another route?"

"Yes. If you want it straight, the Tube is not safe."

"You are joking."

But as I looked into his cold, thoughtful blue eyes, I knew he had never been more serious.

"I wish that you would go by the Trans-Atlantic Air Liners. They are just as fast."

"But you used to be so enthusiastic about the Tube, Dutch! Why I remember when it was being drilled that you would call me up at all kinds of wild hours to tell me the latest bits of news."

He nodded slowly.

"Yes, that was in the days before the crack."

"Yet you expected to take care of possible leaks, you know," I countered.

"But this crack opened after the tunnel had been dug past it, and lately it has opened more."

"Are the other engineers alarmed?"

"No. We are easily taking care of the extra water and again the opening seems to remain at a stationary width as it has for the past three years. But we cannot caulk it."

"Are you going to publish these views?"

"No. I made out a minority report. I can do no more."

"Dutch, you are becoming over-cautious. First sign of old age."

"Perhaps," with the old smile.

"But after all it is now more than three years since we have had a talk on the Tube. After it began to function as well as the Air-Express you sort of lost interest in it."

"And the world did too."

"Certainly—but the public ever was a fickle mistress. Who said that before me?"

He laughed and blew out a long puff of smoke.

"Everyone, Bob."

"But as to the Tube, if I cross under the sea, I would want to be as well informed on the road as I was three years ago. Now in the meantime, you have dropped interest in the long tunnel while I have become more interested in textiles—with the result that I have forgotten all I ever did know—which compared to your grasp of the details, was little enough."

BUT his face showed none of the old-time animation on the subject. What a different man, I mused to myself, from that enthusiastic engineering student that I used to come upon dreaming over his blue-prints.

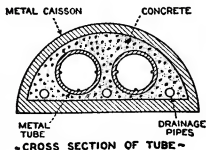
He was considered "half-cracked" in those days when he would enthuse over his undersea railroad, but his animated face was lit with inspiration. Now the light was gone.

"Well Dutch, how about it? Aren't you going to make me that brief little sketch of the length plan and cross-section of the Tube? I remember your sketch of it in college, and it tends to confuse me with the real changes that were made necessary when the wind-propulsion method was adopted."

"All right, old timer. You remember that the Tube was widened at the sides in order that we could make two circular tubes side by side—one going each way."

"I had forgotten that they were circular."

"That is because of the pressure. A circle presents the best resistance," and picking an odd envelope from his pocket, he made the following sketch and passed it to me.

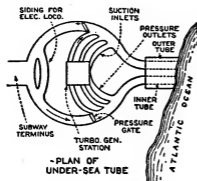


AMAZING STORIES

I nodded as I recognized the cross-section.

"Now the plan of the thing is like this" he added, putting aside his pipe and pulling a sheet of paper from the corner of his desk.

Rapidly, with all his old accuracy, he sketched the main plan and leaned over as he handed it to me.



"You see," he explained, picking up his pipe again, "both pumps work at one time—in fact, I should say all four, because this plan is duplicated on the English side. On both ends then, a train is gently pushed in by an electric locomotive. A car at a time goes through the gate so that there is a cushion of air between each car. The same thing happens at Liverpool. Now, when the due train comes out of the suction tube, it goes on out the gate, but the air behind it travels right on around

and comes in behind the train that is leaving."

"But how are you assured that it will not stall somewhere?"

"It won't be likely to with pressure pumps going behind it and suction pumps pulling from in front. We can always put extra power on if necessary. Thus far the road has worked perfectly."

"How much power do you need to send it through, under normal conditions?"

"Our trains have been averaging about fifty tons, and for that weight we have found that a pound pressure is quite sufficient. Now, taking the tunnel's length as four thousand miles (of course it is not that long, but round figures are most convenient) and the tube width eleven and one quarter feet each and working this out we have 3,020,000 cubic feet of free air per minute or 2,904,000 cubic feet of compressed air, which would use about 70,000 horse power on the air compressor."

"But isn't the speed rather dizzy?"

"Not any more dizzy, Bob, than those old fashioned money-carrying machines that the department stores used to use—that is in comparison to size. The average speed is about 360 feet a second. Of course, the train is allowed to slow down toward the end of its run, even

before it hits the braking machinery beyond the gate."

"But how much pressure did you say would be put on the back of the diaphragm—I remember that each car has a flat disc on the back that fits fairly tightly to the tube . . ."

"The pressure on the back is less than seven tons. However, the disc does not fit tight. There are several leaks. For instance, the cars are as you know, run on the principle of the monorail with a guiding rail on each side. The grooves for the rails with their three rollers are in each car. There is a slight leakage of air here."

"You used the turbo type of blower, didn't you?"

"Had to because of the noise. We put some silencing devices on that and yet we could not kill all of the racket. However a new invention has come up that we will make use of soon now."

BUT I can't understand, Dutch, why you seemed so put out when I announced my intention of going to Europe via the Tube. Why, I can remember the day when that would have tickled you to death."

"You followed the digging of the Tube, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"You remember the volcano and lava seams?"

"Yes."

"Well, I do not believe that the crack was a pressure crevice. If it had been, we were far enough below the ocean floor to have partly relieved the situation by the unusually solid building of the Tube. The tremendous shell of this new type of specially hardened metal—"

"And the rich concrete that was used as filling! That was one job no one slipped up on. I remember how you watched it—"

"Yet the crack has widened Bob, since the Tube was completed."

"How can you be certain?"

"By the amount of water coming through the drain pipes."

"But you said that once more it was stationary."

"Yes, and that is the very thing that proves, I believe, the nature of the crack."

"I don't follow you."

"Why it isn't a crack at all Bob. It is an earthquake fault."

"Good heavens, you don't mean—"

"Yes I do. I mean that the next time the land slips our little tube will be twisted up like a piece of string, or crushed like an eggshell. That always was a rocky bit of land. I thought in going that far north, though, that we had missed the main line of activity; I mean the disturbances that had once wiped out a whole nation, if your scientists are correct."

"Then you mean that it is only a matter of time?"

"Yes, and I have been informed by one expert that the old volcanic activity is not dead either."

"So that is what has stolen away your laugh?"

"Well I am one of the engineers—and they won't suspend the service."

"Fate has played an ugly trick on you Dutch, and through your own dreams too. However, you have made me decide to go by the Tube."

He took his pipe out of his mouth and stared at me.

"Sooner or later the Tube will be through, and I have never been across. Nothing risked—a dull life. Mine has been altogether too dull. I am now most certainly going by the Tube."

A bit of the old fire lit up his eyes.

"Same old Bob," he grunted as I rose, and then he grasped my hand with a grin.

"Good luck, my boy, on your journey, and may old Vulcan be out on a vacation when you pass his door."

Thus we said good-by. I did not know then that I would never see him again—that he also took the train that night in order to make one last plea to the International Committee, and so laid down his life with the passengers for whom he had pleaded.

It was with many conflicting thoughts, however, that I hurried to the great Terminus that fatal night, where after being ticketed, photographed and tabulated by an efficient army of clerks, I found myself in due time, being ushered to my car of the train.

FOR the benefit of those who have never ridden upon the famous "Flier," I could describe the cars no better than to say that coming upon them by night as I did, they looked like a gigantic, shiny worm, of strange shape, through whose tiny port-holes of heavy glass in the sides, glowed its luminous vitals.

I was pompously shown to the front car, which very much resembled a tremendous cartridge—as did all of the other segments of this great glow-worm.

Having dismissed the porter with a tip and the suspicion that my having the front car was the work of my friend, who was willing to give me my money's worth of thrill, and that the porter was aware of this, I stowed away my bags and started to get ready for bed. I had no sooner taken off my coat than the door was opened and an old fellow with a mass of silver hair peered in at me.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I understand you have engaged this car alone?"

"Yes."

"I can get no other accommo-

dations tonight. You have an extra berth here and I must get to Paris tomorrow. I will pay you well—”

I smiled.

“Take it. I was beginning to feel lonesome, anyway.”

He bowed gravely and ordered the porter to bring in his things. I decided he was a musician. Only artists go in for such lovely hair. But he undressed in dignified silence, not casting so much as another glance in my direction, while on my part I also forgot his presence when, looking through the port-hole, I realized that the train had begun to move. Soon the drone of the propelling engines began to make itself heard. Then the train began to dip down and the steel sides of the entrance became too high for me to see over. My friend of the silver hair had already turned off the light, and now I knew by the darkness that we had entered the Tube. For some time I lay awake thinking of “Dutch” and the ultimate failure of his life’s dream, as he had outlined it to me, and then I sank into a deep, dreamless sleep.

I was awakened by a terrible shock that hurled me up against the side of the compartment. A dull, red glow poured through the port-hole, lighting up the interior with a weird, bloody reflection. I crept painfully up to the port-hole and looked out. The

strangest sight that man has ever looked upon, met my eyes. The side of the wall had blown out into a gigantic cavern, and with it the rest of the cars had rolled down the bluff a tangled, twisted mass of steel. My car had almost passed by, and now it still stuck in the tube, even though the last port-hole through which I peered seemed to be suspended in air. But it was not the wrecked cars from which rose such wails of despair and agony that held my attention, but the cavern itself. For it was not really a cave, but a vast underground city whose wide, marble streets stretched away to an inferno of flame and lava. By the terrible light was lit up a great white palace with its gold-tipped scrolls, and closer to me, the golden temple of the Sun, with its tiers of lustrous yellow stairs—stairs worn by the feet of many generations.

Above the stairs towered the great statue of a man on horseback. He was dressed in a sort of tunic, and in his uplifted arm he carried a scroll as if for the people to read. His face was turned toward me, and I marveled even in that wild moment that the unknown sculptor could have caught such an expression of appeal. I can see the high intellectual brow as if it were before me at this moment—the level, sympathetic eyes and the firm chin.

THEN something moving caught my eyes, and I swear I saw a child—a living child coming from the burning city—running madly, breathlessly from a wave of glowing lava that threatened to engulf him at any moment. In spite of all the ridicule that has been showered upon me, I still declare that the child did not come from the wreckage and that he wore a tunic similar to the one of the statue and not the torn bit of a nightgown or sheet.

He was some distance from me, but I could plainly see his expression of wild distraction as he began to climb those gleaming stairs. Strangely lustrous in the weird light, was that worn stairway of gold—gold, the ancient metal of the Sun. With the slowness of one about to faint he dragged himself up, while his breath seemed to be torn from his throat in agonizing gasps. Behind him, the glowing liquid splashed against the steps and the yellow metal of the Sun began to drip into its fiery cauldron.

The child reached the leg of the horse and clung there.

. . . Then suddenly the whole scene began to shake as if I had been looking at a mirage, while just behind my car I had a flashing glimpse in that lurid light of an emerald-green deluge bursting in like a dark sky of solid water, and in that split-second be-

fore a crushing blow upon my back, even through that tangle of bedclothes, knocked me into unconsciousness. I seemed to hear again the hopeless note in the voice of my friend as he said:

“—an earthquake fault.”

After what seemed to me aeons of strange, buzzing noises and peculiar lights, I at last made out the objects around me as those of a hospital. Men with serious faces were watching me. I have since been told that I babbled incoherently about “saving the little fellow” and other equally incomprehensible murmurings. From them I learned that the train the other way was washed out, a tangled mass of wreckage just like my car, both terminus stations wrecked utterly, and no one found alive except myself. So, although I am to be a hopeless cripple, yet I am not sorry that the skill and untiring patience of the great English surgeon, Dr. Thompson, managed to nurse back the feeble spark of my life through all those weeks that I hung on the borderland; for if he had not, the world never would have known.

As it is, I wonder over the events of that night as if it had not been an experience at all—but a wild weird dream. Even the gentleman with the mass of silver hair is a mystery, for he was never identified, and yet in my mind's recesses I can still hear

his cultured voice asking about the extra berth, and mentioning his pressing mission to Paris. And somehow, he gives the last touch of strangeness to the events of that fatal night, and in my mind, he becomes a part of it no less than the child on the

stairs, the burning inferno that lit the background, and the great statue of that unknown hero who held out his scroll for a moment in that lurid light, like a symbol from the sunken City of the Dead.

THE END

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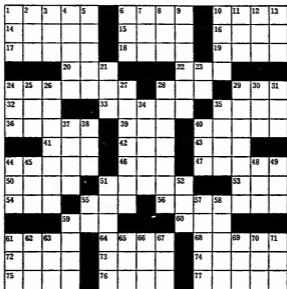
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AM-3

SF CROSSWORD

BY JACK SHARKEY



ACROSS

1. A sort of monster, as far as children are concerned.
6. From curtain to curtain in France.
10. The first firing of a rocket.
14. What a hero has to be in an asteroid belt.
15. The only thing to do when your last ray-cartridge goes.
16. Audible sign of alien monster.
17. A South American ruminant.
18. One-third of a trident.
19. South American ethnic group.
20. Say "Hello" to the centurion.
22. A fruit associated with Newton.
24. What a spaceship will do if you cut the power in space.
28. However.
29. Witch's aide.
32. What spies do in other people's laboratories.
33. An African enclosure.
35. A dead ringer.
36. What invading spacefleets want Terrans to do.
39. Technique plus talent.

40. If the dog star started moving around, you'd call it ____.
41. Man's name.
42. What a crewman sleeps on.
43. A southern constellation.
44. Best place to land a spaceship from.
46. What rocket-fuel is getting a lot of these days.
47. Pertaining to the cheek.
50. A fictional scientist seldom is ____.
51. A hotel on Mars should have one.
53. Nice name for a heroine.
54. Retains in possession.
55. An historical period.
56. What motor nerves aren't.
59. A man who practices brotherhood religiously?
60. If a surgeon can't remove a bullet from a woman, the bullet is probably in her ____
61. A rip; also a drip.
64. A man in a spacesuit is rather overly ____.
68. Arch-criminals are noted for their interest in ____
72. Famous fairytale heavy.
73. Bird of prey; also a child's toy.
74. If it isn't urban or suburban, it's probably ____
75. An easy place to reach by road.
76. Solids-in-liquid that produces gas.
77. "Hey, whose Rubaiyat is this?"

DOWN

1. Nero, Henry VIII, and Goering had it in common.
2. A leader worth his weight in jewels.
3. If a gipsy tells your fortune, it's usually a ____.
4. Suffix pertaining to the hipbones.
5. What being a hero takes a lot of.
6. If you're an ____ student, you are ____ to pass.
7. A scream in the Louvre.
8. What it's easy to get on the sunside of Mercury.
9. A heroine on an SF magazine cover is always an—
10. Slang term for pre-engineering course.
11. Length of time it takes to fly to a star.
12. Where a cobra stores its venom when not in use.
13. A singer who forgets the lyric can always "____ -la-la."
21. Ad-lib for heroine of horror movie.
23. The hero's he, the heroine's she, the monster's ____.
24. How to find out military secrets.
25. Always the king in France.
26. Whose wife was Titania?
27. A thirsty villa'n who worked the nightshift and slept in a dirty bed.
28. What a pancake landing does to a fusilage.
29. A horse of another country.

30. Britons keep hale by drinking ____.
31. Escarpment.
34. What the rocket did after the countdown.
35. An hour with Julius Caesar.
37. What the hero and heroine find between perils.
38. What natural blondes never do.
40. A constellation; a type of jet.
44. What it's easy to become on the sunside of Mercury.
45. A quotation attributed to 40 Down.
48. A composite gas, varying in ingredients depending on the metabolism of the planet-dweller.
49. Payload of a science-fiction pistol.
51. What the hero hates to find in his airlock halfway to another galaxy.
52. What Martian high priests use to open the door of the sacred Martian temple.
55. A mid-speech gap-filler.
57. If the horror-story hero is a romancer, the villain is usually a ____-mancer.
58. If you take a guitar to the moon, you probably want to ____.
59. What heroes do to the villain's prisoners.
61. Another escarpment; a duplicate to 31 Down.
62. The subconscious self.
63. What a hero has growing out of each shoulder.
65. What the rockets did in the nick of time.
66. Devoured; the name of a pagan goddess; Cockney dislike.
67. "A cold, wet glittering thing lay upon his lawn . . ."
69. A name for George Gershwin's brother.
70. Spoil; three-quarters of a planet.
71. Mechanical memories in Manhattan.

(Answers on page 146)

EDITORIAL

(Continued from page 5)

York City. His early work in art looked to the past: he was a specialist in medieval arms, architecture and armor. During World War I he designed body armor for U.S. troops, and saw action

himself. He was a Marine Corps combat correspondent in World War II. He then became an expert in writing and illustrating technical aviation material. Eventually he specialized in the forecast of future scientific developments. His authentic previews of space vehicles have been exhibited all over the world.



THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

A LOT of pertinent items have collected due to the absence of this feature from last month's issue. Here follows a quick run-down before delving into the current book offerings.

SCIENCE FICTION INVADES THE ARTS—A Theodore Sturgeon story has been included in one of the most respected of short story anthologies, *The Best American Short Stories 1960*, edited by Martha Foley and David Burnett.

Broadway was the scene of a first-class flop, a play entitled "How to Make a Man" by William Welch. It was based on a Clifford Simak story (about a man who buys a How-2 kit in order to make a robot) which I praised highly in this column some time ago. From what I have read, the fault lies not with Simak's idea but what was done to it. The play was full of gadgets and gimmicks and seemed to

ignore the fact that Simak uses these things to make certain points about society, not just as tricks. The sarcastic tone of the drama critic who equated the weakness of this particular play with his notion of all science fiction undoubtedly set our cause back somewhat. However, a good play could redeem all this. Any budding playwrights in the vicinity?

The Swedish space opera, "Aniara" (mentioned at some length several months ago), is getting closer to our shores. It was performed in French for the first time. The opera has been put on a total of fifty times in the last year, a record that speaks well for its popularity if not for its quality. Judgment on that will have to wait for a more immediate contact.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION—Real scientific achievement collided headlong with some of the hy-

potheses in Arthur Clarke's *The Challenge of the Sea* (reviewed earlier). Hannes Keller, a young Swiss mathematician, successfully completed the deepest dive 810 feet ever made without pressure equipment. His new process, a special mixture of gases he breathes going down and up eliminates the danger of raptures and bends, two hazards of diving.

• Jacques Piccard, a Swiss engineer (and son of the famous balloonist) and Lt. Don Welsh went in their bathyscaph to the bottom of the Mariana Trench in the Pacific, the deepest and most remote spot on Earth. Their adventures have been recorded in a book called *Seven Miles Down* put out by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

• Ed Emshwiller (more familiar to *Amazing* fans as Emsh) was honored when his movie, "Lifelines," was chosen as one of the ten official U.S. entries to go to West Germany's Seventh International Short Film Festival.

• Eric Temple Bell, more familiar to science fiction fans as John Taine, died recently at the age of seventy-seven. In addition to his science fiction books, many of which have become classics, he was the author of some standard works on mathematics. He was the recipient of many prizes and was Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the California Institute of Technology. A re-

print of one of his novels was published recently—*The Greatest Adventure* put out by Ace Books under the name John Taine.

• Other reprints of note that have crossed my desk since the last column are A. E. Van Vogt's *The Weapon Shops of Isher* (Ace Books), Robert Heinlein's *Beyond This Horizon* (Signet Books), Isaac Asimov's readable history of life on Earth, *The Wellsprings of Life* (a Mentor Book of the New American Library), and Robert Silverberg's *Collision Course* (Avalon Books), which first appeared in *Amazing*.

Some of your Blood. By Theodore Sturgeon. 143 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.

This newest original Sturgeon novel joins the ranks of Ballantine's excellent series of horror stories (such as the recent ones by Sarban). But don't let the word "horror" throw you off. This is not an "other world" horror fantasy whose chills are supplied by beings with supernatural abilities. Nor is the tale peopled with ghosts, demons, and wraiths, unless by these terms one can understand that such ghosts, demons, and wraiths can come from within us as well as outside us.

This then is the tale of a man with a psychosis, but no less chilling for the fact that it can

be described in common terminology. Books about psychiatrists trying to get down to the root of a problem usually annoy me. I've read too many with their pseudo-intellectual covering of terms and phrases used to mask an utter lack of true knowledge or data. Books whose narratives consist simply of reports of tests, letters, notes, etc., often bore me for such a technique is frequently used to replace a non-existent skill.

How then can I explain that Sturgeon's book, which sports both of these pet peeves, neither annoys nor bores me. It is a consistently fascinating study pursued with depth, humor, compassion and as sober an approach as is possible with such basically sensational material. To be sure, his introduction, a necessary evil to get us into the story, smacks of a gimmick, but once he gets rolling this tone doesn't enter again until as a kind of epilogue. And by then one is willing to forgive and forget, since the book is so candidly a case study and not a novel.

In his previous novels, Sturgeon has been concerned with the problem of communication between people. In *More Than Human* and *The Cosmic Rape*, he broke down individual barriers and showed the way toward an evolution based on instant and complete sympathy that by-

passed words. On the surface, *Some of Your Blood* may seem like a departure from this pre-occupation; closer examination will show that this is so only superficially. He is still concerned with communication but has chosen to write about the Hell that results from its lack rather than the Paradise that awaits its full and best use.

Epidemic! *By Frank G. Slaughter. 286 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$3.95.*

Before I read this book, Frank Slaughter was only a name to me, a name representing a long list of bestselling non-science fiction novels. So when I received this book by him I was rather pleased. "Ah," I thought, "a well-known writer has been lured into our net by writing a horror story, a what-might-happen-if story." Unfortunately my pleasure was short-lived. This book is very definitely a mixed blessing. In fact, its only virtue is in making us realize by comparison the readability of much of our present day science fiction and the competence of our writers.

As for the debit side, I hate to carp because of the seriousness and believability of his main idea—a plague that hits Manhattan, carried by infected rats from a tramp steamer and made many times more serious by a garbage strike. Yet a few things abso-

lutely must be said. In the first place, the characters! Who says the age of soap opera has gone? The old triangle again! Who do you suppose gets the girl? The rich young man? No, of course not. His poor, up-by-his-own-bootstraps college roommate, etc., etc. Then we have a villain, one who is nasty enough to be hissed at. All very well if the book were for fun but Mr. Slaughter is in dead earnest. One can ignore innocuous characters but that gives extra importance to the plot. As I pointed out, it is one worthy of serious consideration. Perhaps that is why the late Albert Camus wrote a novel on the same subject. But Mr. Slaughter doesn't stick to this one idea. Under the delusion that the more the ingredients the better the dish, he adds to the plague (which is plenty of material for one book) a Communist infiltration, a gang war, a treatise on the public health field and a medical handbook for various wounds and operations. Try to interrelate these things and what started out with some degree of credibility ends up as ludicrous.

The strictly medical portions of the book are done with great authority, but if I were that interested I'd be reading anatomy texts, not novels. All that's left to say is that I hope Mr. Slaughter's fascination with our mate-

rials proves to be a temporary aberration rather than a genuine conversion.

The Wailing Asteroid. By Murray Leinster. 143 pp. Avon Books. Paper: 35¢.

Murray Leinster never ceases to amaze me. He has all the attributes of a bad writer—stock characters, static personal situations, no real psychological penetration, and awkward dialogue on a fairly low level. Yet, he is immensely readable. His saving grace is his ability to tell a story, and in this he succeeds so well that he can almost be forgiven the rest. He has adventures and marvelous tall doings to relate, and he allows nothing, neither character nor plausibility nor scenery to get in his way.

Earth is being bombarded by strange sounds which can only have originated in deep space. Satellite-tracking units in all parts of the globe have recorded them. Careful computation shows the sounds to be coming from a very minor asteroid called Schull's object. This news causes all the wide range of emotions one might expect as people and governments battle singly and collectively with the "earth-shaking" knowledge of another intelligence in the galaxy. (In a report prepared by the Brookings Institute for the National Aeronautics and Space Adminis-

tration, a warning was voiced that unless mankind prepares for the discovery of other life in the universe, our civilization may topple. For the \$96,000 expended to write this report, we could have told them the same thing, and also prescribed a science fiction diet as a cure.)

But however startling the news of other life is to Earth in general, it is even more so to a young engineer named Joe Burke. For he recognizes the message from space as one that he has been hearing at regular intervals since he was eleven years old. Is he then an alien? Or was this knowledge purposely implanted in him by the aliens? If so, why? Or has he been accidentally over-hearing something which was not meant for him? These are just a few of poor Mr. Burke's thoughts. Slowly a concrete course of action presents itself to him, one by which he can put his mind to rest about his own sanity, and maybe help the United States at the same time.

As you can see, it's a plot with possibilities. Mr. Leinster makes good use of them, but as I said in the beginning, you'll be entertained rather than enlightened.

Spacehive. By Jeff Sutton. 192 pp. Ace Books. Paper; 35¢.

Spacehive is the third one of Jeff Sutton's "space science" stories to appear in print, and

even if I had not seen his name on the cover, I could probably have identified this book as his work. You might think such individuality in so new a writer would be all to the good; this is not wholly true. *Spacehive* contains all the good and all the bad features of his two previous stories. In short, he seems to be writing himself into a deeper rut with each new book.

I refer to his work as "space science" rather than science fiction because he deals with the almost-certain immediate future, with schemes that are most probably already on the drawing boards. The central problem in the novel concerns the parts of a spaceship which the United States has orbited into space. A team of experts and astronauts is engaged in fitting them together, but no one had counted on the danger from Russian rockets when the project passes over Russian soil every ninety minutes.

Mr. Sutton's principal concern is not with the effects of this technological advancement on individuals or societies, but with the technological advancement itself. He writes with the detail and authority natural to one whose background includes work in the aviation and missile industries plus experience in technical writing. He does not load his book with vague hypotheses, but

with down-to-earth (no pun intended) information on the gauges, stresses, fuel systems, etc. that are necessary for successful rocket launchings.

He also writes with an almost incredible naivete and awkwardness, a wealth of cliches and sloppy metaphors, and a boring reliance on those supermen of his dreams: the strong devil-may-care types whom he obviously considers the saviors of mankind.

It would seem to me a much wiser use of his specific talents if he would write straight non-fiction science articles for an appropriate publication, instead of passing his books off as novels just because he has sprinkled the pages with a few characters from a stale salt shaker. Are you listening, Mr. Hugo Gernsback, you who have said that it is all right for science fiction to be mediocre as literature so long as its is convincing in its scientific aspects?

Trouble with Lichen. By John Wyndham. 601 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.

John Wyndham, the English author, has an impressive list of books to his credit. He is highly literate and a real craftsman.

These qualities stand him in good stead for they assure that even his less inventive stories (and this is one) will reward the reader. *Trouble with Lichen* tells about a discovery that takes the word "immortality" out of the dictionary and makes it a reality. This is a subject that has tantalized nearly every sf writer, and it can be approached in many different ways. Mr. Wyndham's treatment is basically light weight and superficial which was a surprise and somewhat of a disappointment to me. The novel lacks a sense of the continuity and drive that held the reader's attention from start to finish in his earlier books, *Out of the Deep*s, *Re-Birth*, and *The Midwich Cuckoos*. *Trouble with Lichen* scores its points by poking fun. For instance, while one of the discoverers of the increased life-span has kept it a great secret, the other party has been dispensing it freely in a chain of beauty parlors, in which the wild claims made for its efficacy have been accepted as just another advertising gimmick.

As I said, this one is strictly for entertainment which is certainly legitimate, but one cannot be blamed for feeling nostalgic about his previous yarns.

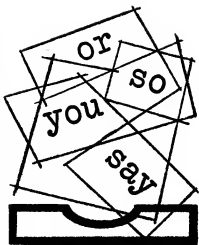


Dear Editor:

I was interested in the views expressed by L. W. Michaelson that you abstracted from his essay in *The Western Humanities Review*. I noticed that his essay suffered from a flaw that quite often occurs when a limiting positive and negative are placed in opposition for thematic purposes: neither the positive nor the negative can hold up under careful evaluation.

I find it very difficult to sort into "pessimistic" and "optimistic" categories those science fiction stories that have been worth critical evaluation; and even the bulk of the magazine stories that furnish the picture for the general trend do not sort easily into either tight category. I have seen mostly in science fiction a willingness on the part of writers to see human values as worth enhancing and developing or criticizing and derogating on a sliding scale of intensity; thus some values have been most harshly treated, and some have been quite tenderly coaxed along.

Very possibly there has been unspoken censorship at work; certainly trends do develop. However, in the development of trends, the popularity of ideas may play a larger part than any editorial steering. When rocket ships were a dream for the 21st Century, there was lure



and novelty in the very idea of interplanetary and interstellar travel; now, even governments are spending money on developing rockets. Such reality knocks the dream rocket story on the head.

Now those human values that interfere with the dreams are liable to suffer rough treatment; for no matter how cynical and realistic a science fiction writer may talk, he is nevertheless a dealer in dreams. He is also science-oriented, apt to be relativistic in his approaches to any theme, no?

Heien M. Urban
6520 Satsuma Ave.
No. Hollywood, Calif.

● *Yes. Dealing in dreams was the great asset of old-line SF, the chief source of its much-bewailed "sense of wonder."*

Dear Editor:

Comments in your January issue on "Optimism vs. Pessimism" are somewhat interesting. However, the whole issue is really obsolete, and of interest only to the older generation.

The younger generation is deep in "Rebarbarization" and they have quite forgotten the real essence of the old Liberal civilization. If you talk about it, they will not know what you are talking about.

Critics of the *Saturday Review* stripe are good for nothing except to drive the publishing business into bankruptcy and keep writers poor. They are trying to drag us back into the past. Their brand of serious literature is dead. Louis Bromfield was the last real serious novelist in the U.S.A., and he has been dead for several years. The *Saturday Review* crowd are as far isolated from the popular mind as if they were living in an igloo in Franz Josef Land.

The smart editor and writer will refuse to have anything whatsoever to do with social comment of any kind. The popular thing is a story about INDIVIDUALS, not Society. I can mention writers in many fields, such as Carter Brown and John D. MacDonald in mysteries. They write stories about individuals. Or, during the 1930's, all the rage was for Leftist

social criticism; but Margaret Mitchell came along with "Gone With The Wind," and outsold all the novels with social significance. Edgar Rice Burroughs became rich writing jungle books for people living in the modern jungle. Somerset Maugham boycotted the "Social" trends entirely and became vastly rich and went hunting with the Aga Khan. . . .

But in America, publishing is saddled with people who want to make propaganda instead of dramatic value in fiction. All of us know all we need to know about Society. We have to deal with its crooked cops and judges and gangsters, and others who have usurped positions astride the powers of the Law. The issue is settled. Civilization is dead. There is a great lot of frenetic activity, but this is merely the activity of maggots in the corpse.

We have come to the time foretold by Spengler, when there is no social destiny, but only individuals, who no longer feel related to Society. Editors and writers who want to make money will act accordingly. The others will LOSE THEIR SHIRTS.

Morris Horton
Suite 1568
1440 Broadway, N Y C

● Or, as *Mao Tse-Tsung* once said, "no tickee, no washee."

● *Herewith a dissertation on what is—and what is not—the function of fiction in fanzines:*

Dear Editor:

Give Schomburg a commendation for the fine cover he did on the February *Amazing*. It's well drawn, pleasingly colored, and embodies a wonderful story to it, through the medium of the drawing alone. As a matter of fact, in light of all the space developments, one can't help but wonder if a similar incident is actually being duplicated today. I note that the artist has refrained from indicating whether the spaceship is of American, or "foreign" origin. The lack of this detail makes the cover even more meaningful.

Jack Chalker brings up some interesting points in OSYS concerning amateur fiction but he could have elaborated further. *Fanzines*, as the title implies, are primarily devoted to *fan* doings. Said fan doings include conventions, reviews of other fan publications, fiction *by* and *about* other fans, etc. etc. The vast majority of fiction in fanzines today consists of "faan fiction" concerning other fans and fannish doings, rather than amateur science fiction. Granted, there is some degree of it, but it has been proven time and again, that the popularity rests with "faan fiction", rather than "fan fiction"

(and there is a big difference between the two terms).

Fandom is a close knit esoteric bunch. It's only natural that stories written by fans, and casting other noted fans and fan doing in leading roles would appeal to fanzine readers. It is not the purpose of a fanzine to help develop a struggling amateur so that one day he may be a full fledged pro. If, in the course of his writing, he does develop into one, then fine and dandy. Certainly criticism is good, but in it's proper place. A struggling amateur writer would do better to earn his criticism from a literary agent or an organization devoted specifically to this job, rather than expect to master the craft through the criticism of the fanzine readers, who, 9 times out of 10, aren't even interested in the fiction, unless it's abnormally good fiction.

Fiction has always been a sticky point in fanzines. I myself prefer to read well polished and well written fiction, both in fanzines and prozines. An editor who publishes either a fanzine or prozine simply for the purpose of publishing fiction, without giving any thought to the quality, is doing a disservice to (a) the writers, (b) the readers, (c) himself.

David Locke, who exhibits all the symptoms of neoishness, asks me if I've ever read any fanzine reviews, and then points to *Amazing* as a prime example. Well

David m' boy, as a matter of fact I *have* read fanzine reviews: hundreds of them, in both fanzines and prozines. I've even written some myself for fanzines. Your example of *Amazing* is a very bad one. I presume you refer to Rog Phillips now defunct "The Club House" which, while well written, was extremely uncritical, and Rog made a habit of handing out good reviews to just about anything he received. The reviews conducted by the editor in the old Standard magazines were far better than Rog's. And further, the fanzine review columns in fanzines of today are well handled and interesting to read, if you happen to be familiar with the esoteric and "inner" allusions mentioned. I for one would like to see a fanzine review column reappear in the prozines, written not by a pro but by some well known fan familiar with the field, who would be much more capable of offering valid criticism and praise.

Mike Deckinger
85 Locust Ave.
Millburn, N.J.

Dear Editor:

The Schomburg cover for your February issue of *Amazing* was superb, and I was glad to see it was accurate as to the story it was illustrating. The inside illos were very good and also accurate

which shows the illustrators are reading the story before they illustrate it. Lately I've noticed you've divided the issue's illos between two illustrators having each draw three or four apiece, which I think is a very organized setup—no longer is there any slipshod work in your mag. Speaking of illustrators, I'm hoping to see more of Adkins whom you featured in your January issue. Also in your January issue you featured an extra back cover table of contents—what made you eliminate it on your Feb. issue? It was a good idea—at least it's more attractive than an advertisement.

And as to the stories . . . the biological fact article by Dr. McClatchie was both well-written and interesting—how about more later on? And then there was that short novel by A.B.C. (A. Bertram Chandler). To be frank with you, I haven't enjoyed a story so much since you printed "Star Surgeon," by Alan E. Nourse, back in December, 1959.

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N.Y.

● *The covers are printed earlier than the inside of the magazine, so we do not always know far enough in advance exactly what is going to be in an issue. How do you like the back cover this month?*

● *The following two comments refer to Gernsback and the prime function of an SF story:*

Dear Editor:

I must take exception to the statement made by Hugo Gernsback in a speech made before The Science Fiction Society of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and highlighted in your February editorial. He stated that he believed science fiction to be "... educational first and foremost because it always aims to instruct." He believes the entertainment value to be only incidental.

Now I don't claim to be an expert on modern science fiction as Mr. Gernsback undoubtedly is, but in my opinion science fiction is entertainment first and foremost and educational only secondly. For without entertainment value it would have no value as literature, minor though it be, and would be of interest only to the science fiction scholar. I for one, and I'm sure I'm not alone, read science fiction because of its unique entertainment value. Each story is a new experience unlike any other story form. If it were not for the pleasure it affords me I would not read science fiction.

A story that instructs without entertaining doesn't deserve to be in story form, it should be in an essay or a textbook where it would rightfully belong and not in a

piece of fiction where the main job is to entertain the reader.

Paul Olariu
23038 Beech
Dearborn, Mich.

Dear Editor:

I can't agree quite fully with some of Hugo Gernsback's view as expressed in the February *Amazing*. Mr. Gernsback seems to believe that science fiction is the only form that can carry important ideas, and therefore magazines should print only science fiction and reject pseudo-science stories and fantasy. Perhaps fantasy or pseudo-scientific forms aren't the best for presenting the purely scientific concept but what about social ideas? In our fast moving world with all its problems they are just as important and rate equal space, and fantasy can present them just as well. I agree with the Father of Science Fiction when he says that s-f should instruct, but I say that it **MUST** be first and foremost ENTERTAINING or it will be incapable of finding an audience for the instruction.

Reader Scott Neilson underestimates *Amazing* when he doubts that Heinlein has ever appeared on its pages. Check the April-May 1953 number. And, by the way, that particular issue also had H. L. Gold, Ted Sturgeon, Richard Matheson, and Murray

Leinster as contributors. To all other doubters: any magazine that has been around for 35 years is bound to have at least one story from all of the big name writers.

David B. Williams
714 Dale Street
Normal, Illinois

● *We're inclined to agree that fantasy has its points as a springboard for social comment. For example: Gulliver's Travels. And without the element of entertainment, neither SF nor fantasy will be reaching the audience it should and must reach if the two fields are to find new readers in young generations.*

Dear Editor:

Your February issue of *Amazing* was definitely not up to par. You seemed to put in any old story just to meet your deadline. Don't sacrifice quality for quantity.

There is more to a story than good vocabulary, grammar and smoothness. It is the idea that counts. The best kind of science fiction story is one that takes a trend from the here and now and moves it up into the future. When a story is just plopped in one's lap, setting 2500 AD for example, without any attempt to establish the connection between that futuristic year and the present it ceases to be science fiction and

becomes pure fantasy. It is not enough to tell about the new machines without doing some deep telling about the sociological reaction of society to the new inventions. That's why Sam McClatchie's story, "The Last Vial," was so well received. It was more than entertainment. He established the connection of a present trend to a future event. It was believable. Of course since his setting was in the very near future the connection was not too difficult to establish. His article in your February issue was the same way. He showed us a trend and then took it step by step into the future explaining the why and how of things the way he saw it. His article or his story was not just entertainment, it was food for thought. All good science fiction should make one pause and ponder after reading it. People who don't want to think have no business reading it, and the same goes for the writers.

J. H. Sandin
67 Mansfield Apts.
Storrs, Conn.

● *Dr. McClatchie gets on the receiving end of the old adage—you can't please everybody all the time; just most people . . .*

Dear Editor:

In your Feb. '61 issue of *Amazing*, you asked who else thought

"The Last Vial" was going to be controversial. I don't really see where the controversy lies; I did not like it. The plot was all right and the characterization was fair but it seemed that on every other page, the author had the young doctor climbing in bed with his assistant. Although I can't deny that this concerns biology, I am doubtful that it was needed that much to further the story. I am doubtful that it was needed at all. I am not prudish (I am a normal teenager), but after all, if I wanted what that story gave me as far as sexual feeling goes, I could have purchased the same and probably much better books meant for that purpose. It was these recurring "bed-scenes" that completely ruined the novel for me.

The first two issues of your new *Amazing*, I was completely satisfied with as far as the cover went. But these last issues had the most unappealing cover this magazine has had in many a day. I am sure that more criticism will be coming in, so I will not say more on this subject.

Aside from the two stories mentioned, I have been more than satisfied with your magazine and its stories. They are far better than average and the type of material I would expect from a magazine of your great reputation. It is for this reason that I have every magazine issue since

July '58, and hope to have every one put out from this date on.

Michael J. Carroll
112 Tobar
El Paso, Texas

Dear Editor:

The new *Amazing* started off well. All the stories and features were good except the Bone piece which was disappointing, however that was redeemed by "A Question Of Courage" in the December issue.

"The Last Vial" was definitely the best serial you ran last year. The thing that struck me most about the story was the good characterization. Something which many science fiction stories seem to lack. There are a lot of supermen and cardboard characters encountered in SF writing, but few flesh and blood characters.

Brent Phillips
46 Barbados Road
Port-Of-Spain, Trinidad

Dear Editor:

I have just finished your recent serial "The Last Vial" and thought it was an excellent story. But, I think the author lost himself when he went to war. He had an excellent story line on the social consequences after the sterilization flu and should have followed it up, or

at least elaborated on it. I think the story was weak in the sense of unity. The scope of the story was quite large and the lack of unity could be expected.

Charles Steinberg
1674 Byrant Ave.
Bronx 60, N.Y.

● *A new look at Esperanto:*

Dear Editor:

I would like to take issue with some few points which Lester Del Rey brought out in connection with Esperanto in his article, "Violets Are Blau."

For the generally kindly tone of his remarks, the Esperantists of the world will, in all likelihood, grant Mr. Del Rey the right to display an additional yak tail in front of his tent. However, it would seem that Mr. Del Rey is neither very expert with the language itself or very well acquainted with the history of Esperanto since the end of World War II.

I could take issue with his remarks on Esperanto grammar and spelling, but I shan't. In a few more re-births he will achieve final and ultimate enlightenment, I suppose. But, I would indeed lock horns with him because of his remark, "There were a lot of little difficulties to Esperanto that added up to many objections

to it." It would seem that Mr. Del Rey has not gotten very far with his studies of the language. Frequently, the "little difficulties" which the beginner finds exist only in his own lack of logical insight. After he gets a little further along in his textbook, he sees that there was a jolly good reason for such and such a usage, and that Dr. Zamenhof knew what he was doing.

Mr. Del Rey shows a surprising mixture of factual information regarding Esperanto (for which he should be crowned with golden oak leaves) and misinformation (for which I hope the more fanatical Esperantists will forgive him.) Foremost, he gives the impression that the period of Esperanto's greatest strength was following World War I.

Esperanto has had a growing following since 1887, but its greatest growth has been since the end of World War II. The "heartland" of Esperanto has always been Europe, but the newly born Esperanto movements of Asia and Africa have shown a blasting vitality, vigor and enthusiasm which has literally astounded even the most optimistic partizans of Esperanto in Europe and North America.

As a dark horse claimant for the position of "the language of the future," Esperanto is in a stronger position than it ever has been. Ironically enough, Esperan-

to may someday (in the lifetime of our grandchildren perhaps) be the national language of a united black Africa. Periodicals like "Nia Afriko," "Nova Espero," and "Afrika Stelo" are serving as textbooks to thousands. Some Africans, reading and writing for the first time, are literate in no other language.

In the Far East, the Japanese have been strongly pro-Esperanto for many years now. The Universal Esperanto Congress for the year 1965 is slated for Tokyo, the first such international Esperanto gathering to be held in Asia.

Dynamically new Esperanto movements have been established in Korea, India, Ceylon, Indonesia, and Nepal.

Also, Japan's rapidly growing new religion, the Oomoto Kyo, has officially adopted Esperanto, and Oomoto missionaries in southeast Asia, Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, and the Japanese colonies in Brazil are spreading the use of Esperanto as well as their own peculiarly unique doctrines. Esperanto, rather than Japanese, is the "Latin" of the Oomoto Kyo.

So far as Esperanto and science-fiction are concerned, I think that many science-fiction writers are really missing a bet when they don't investigate the possibilities of recent (post World War II, post-Korean War) Esperanto history as sources for ideas. Strange? Certainly. Mad? Per-

haps. Interesting? By all means.
Edward F. Lacy III
P. O. Box 805
Houston 1, Texas

Dear Editor:

Both your mags seem to be improving lately in respect to the quality of the stories you're running.

Amazing: Really has improved since I first saw it a little over 2 years ago. More stories by Silverburg, Simak, Sheckley, and others of their caliber! More science-fact by Dr. McClatchie! Keep those reprints coming. I wasn't around to see them the first time and they're excellent!

One other point, don't publish derogatory letters in your letter-columns unless they offer *constructive* criticism on improving your magazines. Now that I've saved you all that space, you'll be able to print my letter in their place.

Lawrence Crilly
951 Anna Street
Elizabeth, New Jersey

Dear Editor:

Literary allusions and references are often useful for ornament or illustration or any of a number of others purposes, but when they are cited erroneously they make a bad impression. The user then assumes a posture of glib pseudo-sophistication, and appears as an arrant *poseur*:

whatever impression he presumes to create is either lost altogether or reversed in its effect, making the whole thing ridiculous.

Your lead story in the current issue of *Amazing*, "A Dusk of Idols," is ruined for me by someone's awful ascription of one of Marlowe's best lines to Goethe, quoted at the head of the story.

Blunders like this continue to remind us, of course, of the eternal verity of the line itself:

"Why, this is Hell, nor am I
out of it!"

In case you still don't know what I am talking about, see "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus," Scene III, line 81.

Floyd E. Overly, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of English
Wisconsin State College

● *Sorry. Guess we should have called the story "A Dusk of Editors." It was our fault—not Blish's.*

Dear Editor:

February's *Amazing* was very lonely. I found Hamilton and Porges very tried, and adolescent. But God your editorial was disappointing. This was my first copy of *Amazing*; I think it's also the first s-f periodical I've picked up. But I've been reading s-f for years (hardcovers) and

I've read some great stuff. It was great stuff because the authors weren't searching like impressionable idiots for some new and studiously outlandish gimmick or mutation. These guys were WRITERS, and as writers they were interested in people—their reactions to others and to external stimuli. The stories were great because the characters lived, and felt, and hurt, and their minds were probed deeply for meaning and depth.

But man, your editorial relegated s-f to the kiddie science corner where it could impress the kids with rocket ships and space cadets, and expressions like "great Jupiter!" and "holy Saturn's rings!". Well that's alright for kids, but the mature reader wants something more. S-f must mature, and it must become literature, and you are not helping one lousey damn. I would like to see the genre accepted in literary circles. It will never be accepted if you continue to aim your stuff at adolescents and anemic grown-up kids with an age level of 12 years.

Stul Kroin

860 Columbus Ave.
New York 25, N. Y.

● *Into each life some blasts must come. But we can't quite understand your reaction to the editorial, which consisted mostly*
(continued on page 146)



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... OR SO YOU SAY

(continued from page 144)

of excerpts from a speech by Hugo Gernsback, a speech most SF fans found important and interesting.

Dear Editor:

I thoroughly enjoyed Chandler's "When the Dream Dies" in the February issue. All of Chandler's Rim Worlds stories are good, but that one was better than average. Complete novels in one issue are okay, but I hope you'll continue printing serials, as has been your recent policy.

The covers on the Z-D mags have been so good recently, especially the ones by Schomburg, that they are putting other magazine's covers to shame. It will be a great mistake if you let some other mag snatch Schomburg from you. No kidding, this guy is GREAT!

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The law that magazines have to give a record of their sales is proving to be interesting. I had no idea that *Amazing* outsold F&SF. If your current rate of improvement continues, you'll soon be tops in sales.

Michael Padgett
3230 Washington Road
Martinez, Georgia



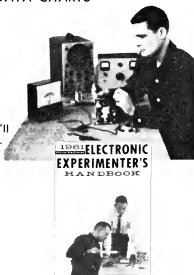
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At 35, James Comstock was still an infant when it came to knowing what life was all about.

(See The Planet of Shame)